

Trailer

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Preacher: Bishop Trevor Walters

[0 : 00] I would invite you to pray with me. Father, we do ask you again that you would have a specific word for Ben and Joel and Arnold today.

That this would be again an open heaven for them. That they would experience revelation, direction, affirmation.

And we pray too for ourselves, Lord, that we too will have light on our path. To live out our ministry with joy and confidence.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it's a great joy to be here. It always is. Great to be at St. John's. I also want to begin by just thanking you for your prayers for me.

Some of you may have heard that I have had some health challenges. And so, just in a word, they tell you that in December I was diagnosed with cancer.

[1 : 04] Bladder cancer. And I want you to know I did not smoke. Which is the usual explanation. And when I go to another doctor, they say, well, did you smoke?

And I say, no. Did you work with chemicals? And I say, well, you know. No, but I've worked in the toxic underbelly of the church for 40 years. To which the doctors usually say, oh, yes, that will do it. So, I have done surgery. I've done chemo. And it didn't work. And so, next week, I go to see a surgeon.

And we're going to get rid of everything. So, please pray that I will bounce back. I feel absolutely wonderful at this point. And have great strength.

And enjoying ministry like never before. There's a new sense of, I think, purpose. And timeliness about what I'm up to.

[2 : 09] So, join me in that prayer, will you please? And so, I'm delighted to be here. Part of the series in Matthew's Gospel. I've been given chapter 4. The second half of the chapter.

Now, this is a great teaching for a confirmation. Because it marks the end of a period of preparedness before ministry.

Because today, we look at Jesus going out into his ministry. And today, we look at three candidates going out into their ministry. And so, I want to make some connections for you between chapter 3 and chapter 4.

So that you see there's some very clear connective tissue between them. In preparation for today, I listened to David Short's sermon of last week on the temptations. And the only thing I remember is what Joel remembers.

Which was, David is good at turning bread into rocks. And I hope he's not listening to this recording. Otherwise, I should be embarrassed. I want to say to David, the simple solution is you either talk to Joel or you get a Black & Decker cheap bread maker.

[3 : 29] That has not been my concern or my problem. My problem is that I take very palatable water and turn it into very unpalatable wine.

And I need help. So, if anybody can give me some advice after service, other than giving up, which is what I've done, then I'd be open to that.

All right. I've mentioned already, in chapter 3, the heavens open and a voice speaks to Jesus.

His dad is going to say to him two things which will shape the rest of his life. The father is going to give him an identity and he's going to give him significance.

Identity, significance. Where's the identity? This is my beloved son. You'll always be a Walters or you'll always be a Short.

[4 : 38] You'll always be a Gifford. That's your identity. You're a family member. That is a very powerful thing. Now, I have this picture of a contemporary C.S. Lewis moment where the senior demon is talking to the junior demon and saying, Well, you know, 2,000 years ago, we challenged

the spiritual, biological identity of Jesus.

But, you know, things have changed so much today that we can now change, not just, are you the son of God?

But we can now say, are you even a son? Maybe you're a little daughter. That's how far we can mess with identity today.

Wouldn't that be something? If we could mess them up so profoundly from the earliest age that they don't know who they are.

So the father gives Jesus clarity. This is my son, in whom I'm well pleased, significance.

[5 : 56] Because his significance is coming out of pleasing God before he starts work. Not as a result of it. The priests that get themselves in trouble and burn out, the priests that get themselves in trouble and leave ministry, sometimes have a common thread, but not always.

And that common thread is that they are working on their identity and their significance through their work.

Rather than going into their ministry, knowing who they are, knowing that they're loved and valuable, and getting on with the job.

So how do the temptations play out? At the beginning of chapter 4, very simple. We take a certainty, this is my beloved son, and we create a question.

If you are the son of God. If we can unseat and unsettle the certainty of knowing that I'm God's child.

[7 : 15] And of course, suffering and illness often is the subtle way of saying, the devil uses it to say to someone, well, you know, if you're really a child of God, surely this wouldn't have been allowable.

That God would have made sure you didn't get this illness, this situation. So maybe you aren't a child of God in the way that you think you are.

Well, it's a lie. Because I didn't sign up, Arnold, Joel, and Ben, for a ministry without suffering.

I signed up to take up my cross. And that's involved various sufferings. More of which I do not know about, thank goodness.

If you are the son of God, first temptation. Second ones are, well, you know, okay, maybe you aren't the son of God. But, you know, you could be far more significant if you did something pretty spectacular.

[8 : 25] You could get all sorts of honor and accolades if you were to leap off the temple and get the angels to catch you. People would love it.

They'd flock to church. In fact, I've been thinking, no, no. Don't do it. Far too dangerous. My significance is because God loves me.

And you see, the only way you survive in ministry is if you're willing to accept that the congregation may not love you. Particularly if you're going to change the, do something radical in church, like change the musician.

I mean, if I was David Short and I got rid of Terry, I mean, that's like putting a bomb in the church. I've known Terry since 78, so I'm, you know, I'm sure he can tolerate my using him as an example.

So, the devil challenges Jesus' significance and wants to say to him, I think you need to work a bit harder. I think you need to do a bit better. I think you need to do something more spectacular.

[9 : 42] I think you need to be more significant through your work. And so, Jesus says, I'm having none of it.

I'm already significant. So, just to heed that warning. Clergy that go into ministry who are not absolutely certain that they are a loved child of God are vulnerable.

Because their temptation is to work out their significance and identity in their ministry and through their work. Enough said. Let's move on. Now, Jesus is prepared.

He is ready. He's taken his final exam. And Satan was conducting the exam. And he's passed. And isn't it remarkable that the very next thing that happens to Jesus before he begins his ministry is that he gets a phone call.

He gets an email. He gets a text. The word comes in a contemporary setting. And it would be, well, let's say, take the year 2004.

[10 : 56] J.I. Packer gets a message to say, I want your license back. From a former bishop of this diocese.

You are canned, Dr. Packer. And the word rattled around the Christian world so fast that Dr. Packer had been canned by the bishop of New Westminster.

That every single one of us said to ourselves, If Dr. Packer can lose his license, of course we will lose ours.

If John the Baptist is now in prison, hence the email or the text, if he's in prison, then guess who's next?

So, how does Jesus begin his ministry? With the confirmation, not of the laying on of hands, but that he will suffer.

[12:01] Because John the Baptist is suffering, and his end is probably, it was known by Jesus. And now that's what I begin my ministry with, with a certainty that this is going to end badly.

It's not going to end without suffering. You see, expectation management means that if you get the right expectation of what's going on in your life, you will cope with it pretty well.

If you have unscriptural expectations for your life, you won't cope well at all when things go badly in your life. I didn't sign up for this, you'll say.

I expected a better prognosis. I expected more years. I didn't expect suffering.

Right through Scripture, there's clarity that God, on the one hand, heals, and on the other hand, uses suffering for his kingdom's sake.

[13:12] So, the biblical perspective is, when something bad happens, it's not circumstantial, it's providential. And the difference between circumstantial and providential is what?

The difference between God being involved and God not being involved. In the providence of God, he's allowed this to happen in order that his kingdom might come.

It's sobering, and it's joyful. It's good news. You get your expectations biblically orientated, and you can march out the call in your life.

Now, so what does Jesus do when he gets this news? He goes downhill and northwards, which seems like an oxymoron, but it's not. You go down from the heights of Jerusalem to Galilee, but you're going north.

He goes to Zebulun and Naphtali, which is the place where Isaiah had that phenomenal prophecy. These people might have been Vancouver and Victoria.

[14:24] These are the people who walked in darkness, who lived in the region and the shadow of death, and upon whom have seen a great light has dawned.

And Jesus went north to those two cities, not to immediately evangelize, but to actually come to terms with the message that John had been imprisoned.

So how do you cope with bad news if you're a person of faith? You don't do a British stoic thing by saying, oh well, it'll be all right.

We're British. Stiff up a lip, boys. That's being British. That's not being faithful.

It's a huge difference. It's taken me 68 years to work the difference. If you're a person of faith and bad news comes, you say, wow, this is difficult.

[15:38] January through end of March, I kept weeping at unexpected moments. I was processing. I needed to feel what it might be like to lose my connection with my loved ones.

Jesus goes to a quiet place on retreat to process the bad news. That's a deeply spiritual thing to do. Feel the feelings. Process the pain. Reorientate. And go get them. And I have been privileged to be allowed to continue to preach the good news of Jesus in these days.

And I am profoundly privileged to be able to do that. Now, we are ready to go back.

We're ready to go back and to get a team of people together. Many of you, I think, here have probably had the opportunity to put a team together for a business, for a school play, for a corporation.

[17:05] Tell me about your first hires. Who are the first people you put on the team? I think you tell me that first hires are really important because they set the course and the die and the shape and the DNA of what is to follow.

Other employees will model them. You've got to choose the first team members consistently with your values, with your vision and objectives and goals.

Who do we need to take us here? So who were the first four hires for Jesus? The first four hires, all of them were in the same profession.

Doesn't that sound a bit weird? Why choose four people who, you know, these people weren't covering the waterfront? If you'll forgive the pun, they were all fishermen.

Why four fishermen to begin with? Well, let's think about the character of fishermen.

[18 : 21] They're used to extremes of heat, cold, danger. They're entrepreneurial. They've learned to do team ministry on a small boat.

And if you've been out with your wife on a small boat and tried to do team ministry, sailing, Lord have mercy. That's all I could say.

That's much more difficult than operating a large team at St. John's in a big building. Small boat, big building. So these fishermen are, how have they been trained?

by their parents, by generations of knowledge passed down about how you fish. They have apprenticed for years, finally got their own boat.

They're constantly having to be creative because fish are not always predictable. They have to go to different places, try different bait, different approaches.

[19 : 44] And Jesus says to these four fishermen, come follow me and I will make you fishers of people. Well, I'm sure he said fishers of men in those days, but you can't say that anymore.

I'm going to make you fishers of people. So in other words, all of the skills that you learnt are going to be applicable.

All of the personality and the courage and the disciplines that you learnt are going to be relevant relevant to what I'm calling you to.

Because there's one message and that is repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand and you are to be the ones who bring this message.

There'll be other team members who will assist you, but you're the core team here. And it turned out that those were the core team, particularly three out of four, they would carry the day in terms of the leadership and the orientation for Jesus' whole ministry.

[21 : 07] I fear today that we are hobby fisher people. We wear a little bit of bait in our lapel.

we put a bumper sticker on the back that's a fish. And I think we have this sort of belief that somehow if we've got a fish on our bumper that we're going to be flagged down as we're driving by a motorist and they're going to get out of their car and come round to us and kneel down on the road and say, you know, lead me to Christ.

Now, if that happens, well, that's great. Let me know. I'll pull it you for the hands. I'll stop using the illustration. But I have no evidence to stop using the illustration up to this point.

And I think other people are thinking that that little plaque on your office desk, somebody's going to come in the office and grab it and start eating it and ask you to disciple them.

Or somebody is going to leap at your lapel and bite it and you'll have a cardiac arrest. It will be very nasty, that. So tell me about the fish of people you know today, culturally, people who they're all addicted.

[22 : 32] I mean, that's where you begin. They're addicted to fishing. They get up early in the morning, extreme conditions, ridiculous behaviors. they talk only about the size of fish.

They are obsessed with going fishing, latest bait. They hang around at tackle shops. They converse with other people who are doing the same thing.

The only good thing I can say about all of that behavior is that it keeps them out of a lot of mischief. you know, fishing is not all bad and it probably keeps them from having an affair or cheating somebody.

You know, if we as evangelicals are simply the keepers of aquariums and we keep observing the fish in the aquarium and feed them a little bit every now and again, keep them happy, we're likely to not have the repentance that Jesus is talking about which is not to be obsessed with sin.

Sin's a good thing to deal with, but if you're only obsessed, you're meant to be obsessed with fishing, not sin. If you're obsessed with fishing, you don't have time for sin or you have less time, shall we say.

[24 : 03] I know some pretty sinful fishermen. If you want to live faithfully and are not being able to achieve it, it's probably because you haven't turned around to live for the sake of Jesus' disposal that you're his to use for his purpose, which is to preach and to bring in the kingdom of heaven.

I like writing, so I've decided to write the last paragraph because I shall never say it quite as I intended it. The first four disciples were professional fisher people.

They knew their trade, they spent years perfecting their skills, they had been trained by expert generations of fisher persons, not by lecturers at the local college who actually were very knowledgeable about fishing but who hadn't actually caught any fish in the last ten years.

Jesus knew that they would bring a professionalism into the work of evangelism. He knew that they would toil all night for lost souls.

He knew that they would venture to dangerous waters to capture the most unusual person for Christ. Not for themselves but for God.

[25 : 29] Not for the mere consumption and profit but for the glory of God and the expansion of the kingdom of heaven. Joel, Ben and Arnold, for God's sake, whatever you do for the kingdom, catch fish.

Amen.