

*S e r m o n s o n*  
*Matthew*

**Fishers of Men**

*Matthew 4:18-22*

*With Study Questions*

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# Fishers of Men

*Matthew 4:18-22*

**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. <sup>19</sup> Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." <sup>20</sup> They immediately left *their* nets and followed Him. <sup>21</sup> 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, <sup>22</sup> and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him (Matthew 4:18-22).**

## **Introduction**

This passage conveys Christ's calling of His apostles. Our pursuit will be to examine the purpose of the call, what kind of people He called, and what He would do with them.

## **The Purpose of the Call**

### **Fishers of Men**

**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. <sup>19</sup> Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:18, 19).**

What is the purpose *of or for* apostles? Jesus called apostles to be fishers of men. Very early in His ministry we see Jesus gathering disciples. Some of these disciples (learners/followers) would become apostles (ones sent forth). To these people the "follow Me" would be accompanied by another call, a call to make disciples or to become "fishers of men."

Although the apostles had a unique office in certain respects, the effectual "follow me" through which all Christians are beckoned is always, at some point, followed by "Go and make (disciples)."

The Bible has glorious things to say about making disciples of Christ.

**The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise (Proverbs 11:30).**

**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 (Daniel 12:3).**

Peter will later point out that this call to make disciples is the call of the priesthood of all believers.

**But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9, italics mine).**

In some sense all Christians are to view themselves as fishers of men. And the bait, if you will, of this fishing expedition is to proclaim the praises of God who calls men out of the darkness; a subject we dealt with in our last lesson. Let us not neglect this call in our lives to seek to bring the message of Christ to our neighbors.

The Christian faith is not to be thought of as an elite club but as a rescue station. The great enjoyment of fellowship within rescue organizations such as firefighters, police, lifeguards, etc. is fostered by their mutual willingness to engage in a noble task. The sweetness of the fellowship of Christians should, among others things, be enriched by their common concern for, and effort to reach, the lost.

## What Kind of People Christ Called

### Willing Fishers of Men

**They immediately left *their* nets and followed Him.<sup>21</sup> 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,<sup>22</sup> and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him (Matthew 4:20-22).**

What is not clear from Matthew's account of this event is that, at some level, these men already knew Jesus (John 1:40-42). So we must not assume that there was some mystical, haunting, mindless, or hypnotic sound in Christ's voice that caused them to abandon their careers. They were already followers. Matthew's point seems to be that once their Master called them to be not merely *disciples*, but *disciple-makers*, there was no hesitation in their response; they were willing.

Other texts indicate that their father had other workers so there was no fiscal irresponsibility (Mark 1:20) or neglect of the family business. Yet at the same time there was no great security in terms of the financial future. They were about to follow an itinerant preacher around Galilee.

These apostles received the double-call to the ministry. The *outward* call were the words of Christ Himself, the *inward* call was the Spirit of God working in their hearts to achieve a godly response (Matthew 16:17). Although there is no longer an apostolic office, the Lord works in a similar way throughout history. By His word He issues His proclamation, and by His Spirit He subdues the hearts of men (Romans 8:16).

By the Holy Scriptures God lays claim on our lives and we, like the apostles, should not hesitate to grant an unwavering response to our Master's voice.

It is truly a glorious affair to respond to the call of Christ—especially in ministering His gospel. So much so that the Apostle Paul would cry, "...**woe is me if I do not preach the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16)!**

### The Unique Twelve

Although I believe this call is common, at some level, to all Christians, let me parenthetically and briefly point out the uniqueness of the apostolic office. This unique office (an issue we'll address more deeply later in this gospel) can be clearly seen by simply reading one verse of the Revelation.

**Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Revelation 21:14).**

Beware of people loosely using the term of apostle to describe themselves.

### Uneducated Fishers of Men

By God's grace the apostles were willing. There was, however, another attribute that these men, who would be the pillars and foundation of the church, would have. There is a biblical principle seen throughout the entire Bible—found in the episodes of Moses, Gideon, David, etc—spelled out in Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth.

**For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.<sup>27</sup> But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;<sup>28</sup> and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,<sup>29</sup> that no flesh should glory in His presence (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).**

Simply put, God chooses to use the unimpressive to make the big impressions. He does this that **“no flesh should glory in His presence.”** Jesus didn’t go to the universities or the Sanhedrin to pick His followers, even though it seems there were some there. He chose **“the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are.”**

This would be manifested later in the ministry of the apostles.

**Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).**

Clearly the apostles had not been technically educated at the well-known rabbinical schools. They were rough and uncouth Galileans.

### **What He Would Do With Them**

#### **Preparing the Uneducated Fishers of Men**

Is the uneducated nature of the apostles an argument for ignorance in the ministry? Is it true that all one needs is a heart for the ministry even though he be woefully inadequate in doctrine and training? Not only is this inconsistent with clear testimony of Scripture regarding the necessity of Christians leaders to have the ability to teach (John 3:10; 1 Timothy 3:2), but it is inconsistent with the current context of Christ’s call.

Jesus doesn’t merely say, “Become fishers of men.” He says, **“I will make you fishers of men.”** Interesting that today’s Master’s Degree is generally a three-year program. Do any of us dare think that the three years the apostles spent with Jesus was any less intensive or instructional than the modern seminary, divinity curriculum?

Jesus would qualify His followers for their labors. Matthew Henry explains

***I will make you fishers of men. It is He that qualifies men for this work, calls them to it, authorizes them in it, gives them commission to fish for souls, and wisdom to win them.***<sup>1</sup>

*Passion for God and a compassion for men* is truly a wonderful sentiment. But those who seek to be of genuine service to their Master must be fitted and qualified for it.

I once met with a young man who was in full-time ministry in a para-church organization. He was disinterested in doctrine and theology. His ministry was among those in the motion picture industry and he felt that his mere presence was sufficient. He referred to himself as “a warm body for Christ.”

It is wrong to think that mere inclusion in the body of Christ is sufficient to be a suitable minister. I often hear people refer to the number of years in the faith as a sort of badge of legitimacy. But there must be a depth to their knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry, M. (1996, c1991). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Mt 4:18). Peabody: Hendrickson.

We must learn of Christ. We must learn who He was, who He is, and what He taught. How can we possibly expect to bring others to the knowledge of Christ when we remain ignorant of Him ourselves?

The apostles were prepared for the ministry. They did not remain ignorant and uncouth. Jesus wasn't satisfied with their mere availability. It went much deeper than that. Again Henry rightfully recounts,

**The apostles were prepared for their work, by accompanying Christ all the time that he went in and out among them, Acts 1:21.<sup>2</sup>**

## **Conclusion**

This call to follow and subsequent call to go might be referred to as the gospel and the law of Christ. One naturally and necessarily bequeaths the other. This is relayed to us in Ephesians where Paul writes,

**For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,<sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast.<sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).**

God has called us by His grace through faith into communion with Him. This is a gracious act of God. In other words He does this in such a way that **“no flesh should glory in His presence.”**

But the call of God into His kingdom is also utilitarian; that is, we are to be useful. We are to be used of God. We are not apostles, but we have access to their message. It is the message God used to save us. It is the message He has called us to bring to others. This is the Christian's job; it is a glorious labor.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## Questions for Study

1. What was the purpose of having apostles (page 1)?
2. What is the difference between an apostle and a disciple (pages 1, 2)?
3. When Jesus calls someone to follow Him, what does He also inevitably call them to do (pages 1, 2)?
4. Why do you suppose the apostles didn't hesitate when Jesus called them (page 2)?
5. Discuss the inward and outward call. How do we experience this today (page 3)?
6. Why should we be leery of people who refer to themselves as apostles (pages 2, 3)?
7. Why do you suppose Jesus chose uneducated men (page 3)?
8. Is the fact that Jesus chose uneducated men an argument for ignorance in the ministry? Explain (pages 3, 4).
9. How might one explain the "follow me/go" paradigm in Scripture (page 4)?