

Mark 1:16-20

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- [0 : 00] At Jesus' baptism, He was anointed as King as the Holy Spirit came down upon Him. Having been anointed as King, He was led by the Spirit, thrust by the Spirit into the wilderness. Where He battled as our King. He battled on our behalf, the King of Heaven, against the King of this world.
- And He won that first battle, a battle that would continue and take Him to Calvary. So it's clear that the King has come. As Jesus Himself declares as a core element of the good news of God, the Kingdom of God is near.
- And it had come near in the person of Jesus. So the King has come. But where are His subjects?
- As He begins His ministry, we have a King, but we don't seem to have much more than a King. I suppose you could identify John the Baptist as on side with King Jesus, even though his understanding was limited.
- [1 : 23] But even John the Baptist, we're told, was in prison. And so the King would seem to be very much alone. We have a King, but we don't have many subjects.
- We have a King who has a battle to fight, but where are His soldiers? He has a kingdom to extend, but where are His servants who will aid Him and accompany Him in this task?
- Well, in the picturesque seaside scene that Mark describes for us in the passage that we read in the first chapter of his gospel, we find Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.
- And in this scene presented for us, we can identify three essential elements of kingdom citizenship as Jesus calls men to be part of His kingdom, to be His subjects, to be His soldiers, to be His servants.
- And we, as I say, we can notice three elements of that, kingdom citizenship or discipleship, if you wish. And the three elements that we want to notice in the verses in front of us, from verse 16 through to verse 20 of Mark chapter 1.
- [2 : 38] First of all, the call that is extended by the King, by Jesus, the call that is extended. But then we're going to think about the commission that is explained by Jesus to those He is calling.
- And then finally, the third element that we find is the commitment entailed for those who are called and who respond to the call.
- So let's think about these three elements, three aspects of discipleship. First of all, the call extended. Who is it who calls? Well, we can read or remind ourselves of what we have in our passage there in verse 16.
- As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and His brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. And then we read Jesus speaking, addressing these two men, Come, follow me, Jesus said.
- Jesus is the one who takes the initiative, who approaches these two men and calls them that they might follow Him. We'll think about the nature of that call in a moment. But just at the moment, simply noticing that it is Jesus who takes the initiative.

[3 : 49] You might say, well, that's pretty predictable. It's maybe obvious. Of course, He's the one who is going to do the calling. But it's not as obvious as you might imagine.

If we think of Jesus and His disciples as, in a measure, following a pattern that was already familiar in first century Palestine of a rabbi and his pupils, a rabbi and his followers.

And there is a sense in which Jesus follows that pattern, though He breaks the mold. One way, certainly, in which He breaks the mold is that ordinarily it would be the followers who would choose the rabbi.

The rabbi wouldn't go and look for followers. Men who were seeking to be taught, to be trained in the faith, in the Torah, they would identify a rabbi that they felt would be best place to help them.

And they would approach the rabbi and see if they would be allowed to participate with the rabbi and be a disciple of the rabbi. But Jesus turns things around.

[4 : 56] He's the one who goes and seeks out those He will call, those who will be His followers. Here in the passage we've read, it is Jesus who approaches Simon and Andrew, James and John.

They're busy doing their own thing. Again, seemingly, no notion of abandoning their nets. When these men woke up that morning, they didn't for a moment imagine that the day would pan out in any way different to the way it always panned out.

They would be doing their thing, mending their nets, casting their nets, doing what fishermen do. And yet, Jesus has other plans for them.

He has other ideas, and it is His agenda. Jesus' agenda that dominates. So it was with Simon, Andrew, with James and John. And 2,000 years later, nothing has changed.

Jesus is still the one who interrupts, often uninvited, into the lives of those He has chosen to be His followers. And He lays down the gauntlet.

[6 : 06] Follow me. A challenge, an invitation, a command that often is unexpected and often unwelcome. And yet, Jesus takes this initiative to challenge and to invite those who would follow Him.

Follow me. Jesus is the one who calls. And notice who He calls. Well, we might call them as, or describe them as the unlikely and the unprepared. Who would have thought that this King, the kingdom of God has come, the hope of Israel, all of history has been leading up to the coming of this man.

And you think, right, the King has come. Who will He gather around Him? And yet, here He gathers the unlikely. These fishermen, regular, normal guys.

Nothing particularly special about them. They're the ones that Jesus approaches and calls, not only the unlikely, but the unprepared. Again, if we think of the parallel of a rabbi and his disciples, for a rabbi to decide that somebody was worthy of being his disciple, there would be some kind of interview or test to just see if they were prepared for this task or this relationship.

Not so with Jesus. He calls those who seemingly are singularly unprepared for being his disciples. The preparing will come later as they follow Him.

[7 : 37] As they follow Him, they will be trained and taught and prepared. There's no prior requirements to follow Jesus. And, of course, that remains the case. Whoever you are, whatever your circumstances, however much you know or however little you know of the Bible or Christian truth or doctrine, these are not requirements to follow Jesus.

Jesus calls and we follow. Just regular guys. Simon, Andrew, James, John.

Neither rich nor poor. Sometimes there's a lot of stress in saying these were, Jesus called the poorest of the poor. But these men clearly weren't the poorest of the poor. We're even told of their hired men in the case of James and John.

And they were the ones who owned the boat together with their father. And there was others who they would pay a day rate, I suppose, to help them in the task. Just regular guys doing their work.

What about the nature of the call that is extended, that is directed to them? Well, the invitation is to a relationship. Follow me, says Jesus. Follow me.

[8 : 48] Jesus doesn't say to them, follow my example. Well, that is something we do do. But that isn't the heart of the matter. Follow my example or follow my teaching.

This is my teaching. This is my teaching. And I want you to know it and to adopt it, to embrace it, and in some way to follow it. No, that is not the heart of the matter.

Rather, the call, the invitation is to a relationship with Jesus, to follow Jesus, to be with Jesus, to know Him, to walk with Him, to talk with Him, to laugh with Him, to cry with Him, to be with Him.

Follow me. That is the invitation. That is the nature of the call. And again, nothing has changed with the passage of time. This is the invitation that Jesus makes to you.

You are invited to a relationship with Jesus. And as you are invited to that relationship, by necessary and happy consequence, to a relationship with others who are following Jesus.

[9 : 54] It is a curious matter that the word disciple, as we find it in the Gospels in particular, is very seldom found in the singular. It is inconceivable to think about a disciple, alone, solitary.

No, when Jesus calls us to follow Him, He calls us to follow Him in the company of others. And so here we are gathered as disciples of Jesus.

We are following Jesus together, as those invited and called so to do. Well, the call extended, but let's move on and think about another aspect that we find here in this passage, what we're calling the commission explained.

What is it that they are to do? Well, what does Jesus say? Again, turning to verse 17. Come, follow me, Jesus said, and I will make you fishers of men.

Fishers of men. It's familiar language, but why does Jesus employ this particular picture? Well, it's pretty obvious why He employs this picture.

[11 : 02] There is an evident play on their profession. They have been fishing fish, as fishermen do. And Jesus, cleverly, to capture their attention, to impress upon them what it is that they now are to do or are to be prepared to do, He uses this language.

I will make you fishers of men. So that's one of the reasons He uses the language, perhaps the most obvious and evident reason. But I think it's also interesting that in the language that Jesus uses, there is an echo of Old Testament language that we find.

We read one passage in Jeremiah where the language of fishermen is employed. And there's a handful of passages where you have this picture used.

And the interesting thing is that almost invariably the picture of fishermen is used in the context of judgment, where the fishermen's task is to catch the wicked, that they might be judged, that they might be punished.

That's certainly what we read and noticed in Jeremiah chapter 16. But that repeats itself on the other occasions. The fishing that Jesus is doing and that He will train His disciples to do is very different.

[12 : 23] The fishing they are to do is to rescue men from judgment. You can imagine a fast-flowing river where all the fish are heading headlong to a poisonous pool downstream.

And they're heading down. There's no way they can do anything other than just go with the flow, go with the shoal. There's no way they can escape their destiny. They're not even aware of their destiny. And yet, if they're caught, then as they're caught, they're being rescued from that destiny, from that fate.

This is the task of fishers of men. This is what Jesus is doing. He is rescuing men from the coming judgment. And He calls His disciples to do the same, to be fishers of men, rescuing men and women from the judgment that awaits them.

So, it's very different. And yet, this aspect of judgment is not altogether absent. Because those who reject the invitation, who don't bite the bait, if we want to use the picture, well, they are and they remain under the judgment of God.

And so, that the somber shadow of judgment is present, even though the language is being used in a way that is very different to the way it is used in the Old Testament.

[13 : 47] But as we think of this commission explained, the disciples are to be fishers of men, we can think of the matter from two perspectives, two angles. First of all, what it is that Jesus does, and then secondly, what it is that the disciples are to do in this matter of being fishers of men.

First of all then, let's think about the part played by Jesus. Notice what Jesus says there in verse 17. Come, follow me, Jesus said, and I will make you fishers of men.

Jesus doesn't say, follow me and start fishing men. In fact, what he says is somewhat cumbersome, and so the manner in which it has been translated makes it less cumbersome.

But what he actually said to these men was something along these lines. Come, follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men. It's very clear that this is a long-term project.

He's not saying, well, you're fishing fish today, tomorrow you will fish men. That's not what he's saying. He says, follow me and I will make you become fishers of men. And, of course, at this point, that's not what they are.

[15 : 02] They know how to fish fish. They haven't a clue how to fish men. They don't even know what fishing men means, I imagine. Far less how to do it. But what Jesus is saying is, I have a part to play here.

If you follow me, this is what I'll do for you. I will make you into something you are not. You are not fishers of men, but I will make you fishers of men. This is the commitment that Jesus makes to those he is calling.

And you could argue, I think, very reasonably that the three years the despicable spent with Jesus was all about them being trained to become fishers of men.

They learn as they watch the master at work and as they become more like the master, increasingly sharing his heart, his compassion, his burden for the lost, for those who are under judgment and who need to be rescued from judgment.

But this is something Jesus will do for them. I will make you fishers of men. What about you?

[16 : 13] If you are a Christian, I wonder how you rate yourself as a fisher of men. If you had to give yourself a mark out of ten in this task of being a fisher of men, I wonder where you would place your mark in that scale.

Well, I don't know where you would place yourself if you're very humble. Maybe you're very good at it and you'd be very humble in coming to a conclusion. But I imagine, even without knowing many of you this evening, I imagine most of us would probably say, well, I'm useless at fishing for men.

It's something I'm just not very good at. I know that's what I'm meant to do. It's something I want to do. I know it's important to do, but it's just something I am very poor at.

Well, one thing you can be sure of is you're not alone. If that's what you're thinking, in all probability, the person next to you is thinking the same. But I would say take heart. And I would say to you take heart because this is something that Jesus has committed to doing for you.

He is the one who says, I'm going to make you into a fisher of men. And it will take time. And it's not something we're going to become overnight.

[17 : 30] But Jesus makes that commitment to us that if we follow him, he will do this for us. He will make us into fishers of men. We need to learn from Jesus.

We need to learn from others more skilled and experienced in the craft. We need to learn by doing and by feeling. But Jesus has his part.

He commits to make us into fishers of men. But, of course, we have a part to play as well. The disciples called here on this occasion. They had a part to play. What did they need to do?

Well, at the very basic level, they need to stick with Jesus. Jesus said, I'll make you into fishers of men. But if they abandon the discipleship in the early days, the task will not be completed.

They will not become what Jesus commits to making them. They need to stick with Jesus. They need to learn from Jesus. They need to be made fishers of men by Jesus. And as they are made into fishers of men, to begin with, no doubt, inexperienced and limited and cumbersome.

[18 : 38] But they begin to fish. What does that involve? Well, at one level, it involves echoing the call of the Master. Not follow me, but follow him.

Or maybe better, join me in following him. It's really the call that we make. Join me in following Jesus. It's said of a, I think it's an evangelist from India, if I'm not mistaken.

I don't recall the man's name. But he gave a definition for evangelism as something along these lines. One beggar speaking to another beggar and saying to him, come, let me show you where we can get something to eat.

And when we echo the call of Jesus, we don't say follow me. We say, come, join with me in following him. That's the invitation that we extend as fishers of men.

But in some measure, we echo the call of our Master. But also, we need to learn to fish in the manner of our Master.

[19 : 48] What do we learn of how Jesus acted as a fisher of men? That's what he's doing here. He's calling others to be fishers of men, but he himself is man fishing in the passage that we have before us.

And what are the characteristics? Well, we've already noticed one, that he's the one who takes the initiative. Is that something you do? Do you take the initiative in seeking to seek out those that you can challenge and invite and enthrone to join with you in following Jesus?

We notice the very personal approach of Jesus. Here, the King of Heaven, and yet he approaches these men one by one. Men with names and families and backgrounds, seemingly in the grand scheme of things, so insignificant.

And yet Jesus approaches them personally and challenges them and commands them to follow him. Is that something that you're doing? Seeking out those who God places in your path.

Indeed, seeking to be connected with people in a way that allows you to approach them and to invite them and to challenge them, speak to them about Jesus.

[20 : 59] As we think of the Master and how he goes about his task. Notice how he, the location of his task or of the work that he's doing in inviting and challenging men to follow him.

It's very much in the territory of those he is approaching. He goes to the shore of the sea. He goes where the boats are and all the bustle of the hundreds of boats that operated there in the Sea of Galilee.

And that is where he goes, where the men are. He's not on the top of Mount Sinai or in some ivory tower waiting for them to come to him. No, he goes and seeks them out where they are in their territory.

How often, how poor we are at doing that. We're comfortable in our church buildings and in our services. And we say, oh, it wouldn't be great if more people came.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if more people came to hear the gospel? That this isn't the place where we fish. This isn't the place where we fish. We fish out there where people are. We need to go where the people are, just as Jesus went, where the people are.

[22 : 11] The Master also motivated in his reaching out to those who would follow him. Motivated by a concern for their well-being.

For their eternal destiny. That we too would know something of that. How often we read of Jesus being filled with compassion as he saw men and women.

Lost and hopeless. And so motivated by that he goes and seeks to reach them. That too ought to characterize our task of fishing for men.

However poorly and however clumsily we go about it. Before we move on, can I just ask you a question.

A very simple question. Not a difficult question in a way. Perhaps an uncomfortable question. Not a difficult question. Are you fishing? Is that something you're doing?

[23 : 08] If you are a believer, if you're a Christian, then what Jesus says of the disciples, he says to you. He says, you are that, that I might make you a fisher of men.

That is what he wants to do. That's what he wants to make you. Well, are you fishing? Are you catching? Are you even casting out your net?

And then, by all means, leaving it to God, who might be graciously caught up in the net that you cast. The one thing that we can say, I don't know much about fishermen, but one thing I can say, without being an expert on fishing, that the one inescapable and unavoidable and necessary characteristic of a fisherman is that he fishes.

Now, that's not rocket science. But if you don't fish, you're not a fisherman. You might have all the gear. You might know about it. You might talk about it. But if you're not fishing, you're not a fisherman. Well, what about us?

What about you? What about me? Are we fishing? Jesus called you that he would make you a fisher of men. One other thing just to mention in talking about the part played by the disciples.

[24 : 25] We've looked at the part Jesus plays. He will make us fishers of men. We're thinking a little bit about the part that the disciples have to play. And just one thing to notice is that I think there is a link between the commission that the disciples receive at the very beginning of their relationship with Jesus, when he addresses them, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.

There at the very beginning, I think there's a link with a commission that they also receive at the very end of their face-to-face contact with Jesus.

After Jesus died and rose again, he tells the disciples that they're to go to Galilee and that he will meet them there. In Mark's gospel, we have that as we also have it in Matthew's gospel.

And why are they to go to Galilee? Because then in Galilee, Jesus would again commission them. And although the language is different, I think really there is a repetition of this commission with this difference that here at the beginning, they're not yet fishers of men.

They're going to be made fishers of men. But in Galilee three years later, when Jesus addresses them in the context of the great commission, and he calls them, sends them out to all nations to make disciples of all nations, there he is commissioning them again.

[25 : 42] But as men who have been trained to be fishers of men, now they can do it. They've been taught. They are now fishers of men. And so they're sent. And well, history tells us that they were indeed capable.

They were indeed prepared for the task that they were given. And of course, that task continues. It's a commission that is given to us in all the nations and to the very end of the age.

One final thing, and I'll finish with this, and that is the commitment entailed of those who would respond to the call that is extended.

And we read of how these men responded. In verse 18, speaking of Simon and Andrew, we're told at once they left their nets and followed him. In verse 20, we're told how James and John responded, without delay, without delay, Jesus called them.

And then we read, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. That is, what's very striking is that the measure of commitment demonstrated at the very beginning, as they are called by Jesus.

[26 : 58] I think something to maybe bear in mind, as we maybe reflect on our own level of commitment, it is this, that the degree of commitment that we are to offer and give to Jesus, ought to be directly proportional to the authority of the one who calls, in this case, Jesus.

And if we think about that, then really we're left to ponder on the level of commitment that is reasonable in the light of the authority of the one who calls.

This is the king of heaven. This is the one who is king of kings and lord of lords, the one who enjoys all authority. And if he calls us, then anything other than total commitment would be inappropriate and incongruous in the light of his.

Well, what about these first disciples? Let's just notice very briefly some characteristics of their commitment. We see this immediate obedience.

At once, at once they left everything and followed him. We see this, this principal allegiance that is established with Jesus, this priority allegiance.

[28 : 12] It's not to the exclusion of all other allegiances, but nonetheless, there is a priority in their allegiance to Jesus. They leave their nets. Now, we know that this wasn't an absolute leaving of their nets, because subsequently, in the gospel accounts, we find them fishing again.

There's no indication that they sold their nets or their boats. They were still there. So, they're not abandoning completely this economic activity that they've been involved in, but their principal allegiance is now to Jesus.

They leave their father, in the case of James and John. And again, this is a reflection or a pointer to where their principal allegiance now lies, not to the exclusion of others.

There's also this aspect to their commitment that it is a persevering commitment. You see, these same men called on the shores of the Sea of Galilee were back in Galilee three years later to be recommissioned as men who were then trained fishers of men.

And so, they continue. They persevere in their commitment. As we think of these obvious characteristics that we can draw, it serves as an opportunity for us just to pause for a moment and reflect.

[29 : 25] What about me? How could I describe, or how could my commitment be reasonably described? Does it have these characteristics? Are we slow to obey?

Are we reluctant to grant to Jesus that priority in terms of our allegiance? Are we reluctant, or do we find it very difficult to persevere in our commitment to Him, and in our service for Him?

Well, the King has come, and He is seeking His subjects. He is seeking out His disciples. He addressed these men there on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And He continues to come, and to approach, and to direct this call, this challenge, to us.

Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Son. We thank You for Jesus. We thank You that the kingdom of God has indeed come near in the person of Jesus.

[30 : 31] We thank You that in the fullness of time, the hope of Israel, the long-prophesied Messianic King, came into this world.

We thank You for His anointing as King at His baptism. We thank You for the battle that He fought on our behalf, from those days in the wilderness through to Calvary itself.

We thank You for the manner in which He sought out those who would follow Him, and be His disciples, that they would be trained by Him to become fishers of men. We thank You that that is our calling.

We come and we confess that we are often reluctant and stubborn disciples, unwilling to be taught, unwilling to be made fishers of men.

Well, we pray that by Your Spirit, that You would so mold us, that it would be our great desire to be made into fishers of men, and that as we are, so we would be used by Yourself to rescue so many who are bound for a lost eternity, who are under judgment and who face judgment, to rescue them, as we invite them to join with us in following Jesus.

[31 : 52] And all of these things we pray in His name. Amen.