

Matthew 4:18-22

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 May 2010

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] I remember seeing several years ago a t-shirt with the following message on the back of the t-shirt don't follow me I'm lost too I wonder if that sentiment is one that in any measure we can relate to or sympathize with who can we follow with any degree of confidence some might ask the question should we follow anybody at all is it not the challenge that we set out our own route and go our own way and not be concerned with following others is following somebody else not rather a sign of weakness two weeks ago we considered the challenge that was presented by Elijah some 3,000 years ago to the people of Israel if the Lord if Yahweh is God follow him and if Baal is God follow him the suggestion being that one way or another as human beings we will follow follow somebody or something whether we recognize that we are doing so or not on the occasion when we considered that challenge posed by Elijah we noticed that in the light of the fuller revelation of the New Testament we can identify Jesus Christ as the Lord we are invited indeed commanded to follow but what is that all about what does following Jesus look like what does following Jesus involve it is to this question that we want to concentrate our attention this morning and indeed God willing in the following two Sunday morning as we consider different occasions when Jesus challenged people to follow him and we want to consider those occasions or some of those occasions and as we do so learn what following Jesus involves and this morning we will begin with the passage that we've already read in Matthew chapter 4 from verse 8 verse 18 the calling of the first disciples as it is designated in our Bible and the passage records the calling of the first disciples of Simon Peter of Andrew of James and of John I want to consider this passage and very particularly what lies at the heart of it this invitation this demand that Jesus presents that Jesus presents that he be followed and I want to consider the passage in the following way first of all to notice the invitation that is extended then to notice the decision that is taken and thirdly a new life that begins so an invitation extended a decision taken and new life begun let's begin then with the invitation that is extended and consider who it is that does the inviting and what it involves well the invitation very clearly is made by Jesus there in verse 19 we can notice the content the words used by Jesus come follow me and I will make you fishers of men Jesus

Jesus is the one who is the one who is the one who is the one who is the one who is walking beside the sea of Galilee he is the one who approaches these four men and extends this invitation to them the invitation is made by Jesus and you might reasonably be thinking well that's pretty obvious there's not much to be gained from dwelling on such an obvious point and those who were interested in learning or in becoming disciples would listen to what the different rabbis had to say, and they would choose who they would follow, who they would associate with.

So it wasn't the rabbi who did the choosing, but rather the disciples who would decide who they would follow. But here, the situation is different.

It is very much Jesus who takes the initiative. It is Jesus who approaches Simon Peter, who approaches Andrew, who approaches James and John and lays down the gauntlet as it were.

The men mentioned they are doing their business. They are busy doing their own thing. They are fishermen, and they are engaged in their day-to-day activity.

[6 : 42] In the case of Simon Peter and Andrew, they were casting a net into the lake in the very act of fishing, while James and John were involved in mending their nets or preparing their nets, as it's described in the passage.

Everything would suggest that these men had no notion, no intention of abandoning their nets, of leaving their profession and following Jesus.

The picture painted is rather quite the contrary. But Jesus has other ideas, and it is his agenda that dominates.

And we can fast forward 2,000 years and can confidently say that 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. Follow me. It may well be that even this morning, Jesus is engaged in that activity.

[7 : 55] Even this morning, he chooses to interrupt in your life and to say, leave your nets, leave behind and leave to one side those things that dominate your life and that to this point have seemed so important.

And follow me. The invitation is made by Jesus, but also notice the nature of the invitation. The invitation is an invitation to a relationship.

We might even say, in fact we will say, that it's an invitation to relationships, plural. But if we begin by focusing on one particular relationship, and that is a relationship with Jesus.

If we notice the passage, Jesus doesn't say to Simon Peter and to Andrew, come, follow my teaching. He doesn't say to James and John, come, follow my example.

Though no doubt, that would have been a valid thing to say. It would have been quite legitimate for Jesus to have encouraged these men to learn from him and to take on board his teaching.

[9 : 04] It would have been entirely reasonable for Jesus to say, it is a good thing for you to follow in my footsteps, to follow my example. But he doesn't say that. He says, come, follow me.

Follow me. Follow me. And that has within it, very necessarily, this call, this invitation, to enter into a relationship with Jesus.

The verb itself can carry the idea of following behind, as we would ordinarily understand the word follow. But it can also carry the idea of accompanying.

So yes, Jesus is very much the head of the group. He is the one who is determining the direction in which the group will go. But there is this gathering of people, this group of people who together are going from place to place, but in the direction that the rabbi Jesus determines.

The invitation that is being extended to these men is to be with Jesus, to know him, to walk with him, to talk with him, to laugh with him, to cry with him, to live with him.

[10 : 23] That is the nature of the invitation. And again, we can say that nothing has changed. The invitation that Jesus makes today to those that he would have as his followers is in those same terms.

Follow me. Not respect me. Not have a high opinion of me. Not consider my teachings to be very wise and wonderful and worthy of praise.

No. Jesus says, Follow me. You are invited to a relationship with the risen Lord Jesus. And by necessary consequence, and this is coming back to what I said a moment ago about the invitation being not simply to a relationship singular, but to relationships, plural, as a necessary consequence of entering into a relationship with Jesus is that we enter into a relationship with others who, like us, are following Jesus.

We were reminded, even yesterday, those of us who are taking part in the Free Church College Saturday course, and I can't even remember in what context, but it struck me, perhaps because I had in my mind this passage, but we were reminded that the word disciple in the Gospels is very, very rarely found in the singular.

It's almost entirely found in the plural, and that may seem an insignificant detail, and yet I think it does carry significance. There is no possibility of the solitary disciple.

[12 : 06] No. Disciples go together, belong together. So the invitation that Jesus is making to Simon Peter and to Andrew, to James and to John, is one, yes, that they might enter into a relationship with Him, but as they do so, so also enter into a relationship with others who respond to the same invitation.

So there is an invitation extended, and I would invite you to consider, even this morning, if that invitation is not being extended to you.

And what are you to do with the invitation that is made? But there is also a second element that I just want to notice, and it is this, that there is a decision taken.

Yes, Jesus extends the invitation, come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. But the decision regarding how to respond lies with the disciples, or at this point, we might call them potential disciples.

What will they do? How will they respond? And what can we say about that decision that needs to be taken? I think we can say three things.

[13 : 25] No doubt we could say many more things, but three things that I want to highlight concerning this decision. The first one is this, that contrary to appearances, it is an informed decision.

I say contrary to appearances because at first sight, if all we had to go by was this passage in Matthew's Gospel, then it would appear that this is the first encounter between Jesus, and particularly Simon Peter and Andrew.

But it is not. Simon Peter and Andrew already knew who Jesus was, indeed had already in a measure been involved with Jesus.

And we can confirm that by referring to John's Gospel and chapter 1 and verses 35 and following. And if we just notice that briefly without dwelling too much on that, but simply to make the point, in John chapter 1 and at verse 35, we read, the next day John was there again with two of his disciples.

Now this is John the Baptist. And when he saw Jesus passing by, he said, look, the Lamb of God. A very familiar occasion. When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.

[14 : 45] Turning round, Jesus saw them following and asked, what do you want? They said, Rabbi, which means teacher, where are you staying? Come, he replied, and you will see. So they went and saw where he was staying and spent that day with them.

It was about the 10th hour. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, we have found the Messiah, that is the Christ.

And he brought him to Jesus. Well, the reading of that passage doesn't require further elaboration. There, very clearly, we're told that Simon Peter and Andrew had already had an encounter with Jesus, had in a measure expressed and shown a willingness to follow Jesus.

They knew in a measure who Jesus was. They had been involved with Jesus, possibly for several months, in one way or another. And I mention this just to stress that when on this occasion they are called, perhaps in a more dramatic way, in a way that implied a greater commitment to leave behind their nets and to follow Jesus, they respond to that invitation in an informed way.

And it is, I think, entirely reasonable to recognize that you don't abandon everything to follow a complete stranger.

[16 : 19] That would be a very foolish thing to do. It would be a very foolhardy thing to do. It would be a rash thing to do in a moment of emotion or in a moment of excitement to say, yes, I'll follow this man who you know nothing about.

That would not be faith. That would be foolishness. And again, as we bring these things to our own day and our own situation, we can repeat what we have said already that nothing has changed.

And I would say to anybody here this morning, if you don't yet know who Jesus is, if you as yet do not understand what He came to do, if you as yet are not aware of what He requires of His followers, then I would encourage you to find out these things before deciding to follow Him.

Now, having said that, I would urge caution and I would stress that what is required is not an exhaustive knowledge before we can take a decision to follow Jesus.

In the case, for example, of James and John, who are also involved in our passage, we don't know, but it's reasonable to presume that their level of knowledge was considerably less than that of Simon, Peter, and Andrew.

[17 : 48] Though, from other parts of the Gospels, we know that they were involved with and friends with, related to, in different ways, to Simon, Peter, and Andrew.

So, perhaps their knowledge of Jesus, we're speculating, may have been second-hand. They'd heard what others had said about Jesus. We are, I stress, speculating. But it does seem reasonable to presume that they had less knowledge.

So, when I say that a decision to follow Jesus ought to be an informed decision, we have to get the balance right there. It is important to know who He is.

It is important to consider the implications of the decision to be taken. But we ought not to use as an excuse the fact, well, I need to know a little bit more.

I need to consider what's involved for a little longer. Because that could simply be an excuse for postponing a decision that can and should be taken immediately.

[18 : 50] That said, we simply make the point, which I think is a legitimate and an important one, that the decision taken is an informed decision.

But also, secondly, the decision taken is a concrete decision involving at least two elements. And these two elements are repentance and faith or trust in the one to be followed.

Having said that, there may be a reasonable retort. Well, there is no mention of repentance in the words of Jesus addressed to these men.

Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And yet, if we simply go back a couple of verses, we read in verse 17 as follows, from that time on Jesus began to preach, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.

Given what we've already stated concerning the prior contact that certainly Simon Peter and Andrew had with Jesus, it's entirely reasonable to presume, indeed, we can go beyond presuming, to state that they would have known very clearly that the one who is calling them to follow him had at the heart of his message, this call to repentance.

[20 : 15] And if they would presume to be of those who would have the privilege of being in his inner circle of disciples, it is very evident that they would have understood that a necessary requirement for following Jesus was that they respond to this demand for repentance.

So they would have to repent. They would have to recognize their sinful condition. They would have to recognize the manner in which their lives had been lived, not in a manner pleasing to God, but according to their own agendas, recognize that, repent of it, and seek forgiveness.

They had to repent. They had to turn from their wicked ways. And they had to believe. They had to believe in Jesus. Now, given the moment at which this invitation has been extended, it is reasonable to say that believing in Jesus would not be in the full sense of that expression as these men as yet don't know fully yet who Jesus is.

And yet, in the measure that they know, they are required to trust in Jesus. They are to follow Him. They know not where. And that, at the simplest level, we can say, requires trust.

You don't abandon your nets and follow this man unless you trust Him. And even though it may well be that these men didn't at this point fully understand who Jesus was, indeed they didn't.

[21 : 55] And yet, there is a genuine element of trust required. So this decision that they take to follow Jesus is one that involves repentance and faith.

It involves trusting in Jesus. And that remains true today. If you are to follow Jesus, if you are to be a follower of Jesus, if you are to be a disciple of Jesus, you must repent.

Repent, said Jesus 2,000 years ago, and He continues to preach that same message, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. Recognize your condition.

Recognize that you are a sinner. Recognize that in Jesus there is one who is willing and able to forgive you. You have greater knowledge available to you concerning who Jesus is than these men did.

And so, in the light of that greater responsibility also, you must repent, you must believe, you must put your trust in Jesus as your Lord, as your Savior.

[23 : 05] And the reality of that belief will find expression in following Him as these men were called also to follow Him.

So, the decision taken is an informed decision, it is a concrete decision, but thirdly, it is an urgent decision. And this is not to contradict the importance of a decision to follow Jesus being an informed decision.

rather it is to introduce some balance to that. Both are true. The decision to follow Jesus ought to be an informed decision, but it is also at the same time an urgent decision.

Why is it urgent? Why must you urgently consider the matter to hand? Well, there are a number of reasons why it is urgent, and we can simply mention them in the passing.

At heart, I might suggest the main reason why we could call it urgent is because of the identity of the one who is inviting. This is none other than Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, very God of very God.

[24 : 17] He is the one who invites you to follow Him. This is no small matter. This is a matter of great moment, of great weight and importance, because of who it is who is doing the inviting.

This is no itinerant rabbi who will be here today and gone tomorrow. This is Jesus Christ. He is the one who invites, and for that reason alone, it constitutes an urgent invitation.

But it is urgent also, as we notice the manner in which He invites. We have been throughout this sermon using the language of invitation, but in actual fact, the words that Jesus uses are words of command.

Come, follow me. It is an imperative. He is not simply inviting them, He is commanding them to follow Him. And He continues to be the one who has the authority to do just that, to command you to follow Him.

And so your response really is a response of obedience or disobedience. Will you obey the command, or will you disobey the command? These are the options before you.

[25 : 30] It is an urgent decision because the manner in which the invitation is presented is in actual fact a command being addressed to you. It is urgent also because of the great privilege of being approached by Jesus.

And it would be important for us to grasp that. This is a tremendous privilege when we think of these men. here they are in Galilee. There were thousands of men and women.

And yet, God in His grace would have these men be the ones invited. Jesus fixes His eyes for reasons best known to Himself on these men.

They are privileged. They have been selected among the multitude for this opportunity to follow Jesus. And so, the very privilege is in itself a further indication that the decision they take is an urgent one.

There is no guarantee that the invitation that Jesus makes to them on this occasion will remain on the table should they choose to postpone a decision, should they choose to ponder it for too long.

[26 : 48] This is the day in which the decision, or rather the invitation is made. And on this same day, Andrew and Simon and James and John must decide.

Jesus, we are told there in verse 18, was walking by. He was walking by the Sea of Galilee. And as we would visualize the scene, and we do this with a degree of caution because we can't, of course, know for sure what this looked like, but as I would visualize the scene, this picture of him walking by, it's almost as if Jesus is walking by.

He doesn't even pause to sit down and speak to these men. He's walking by, and as he walks by, he says, follow me. He almost doesn't break his step. He continues on, and he would have these men leave their nets and follow him as he walks by.

If they postpone a decision, if they hesitate, if they think too long, he'll have gone. He'll have turned around a corner, he'll be away, the opportunity will have been lost.

And so I would remind you this morning that Jesus is walking by, by his grace he has given you this morning, this morning, the opportunity to hear this invitation extended to you.

[28 : 06] Follow me, respond this morning, don't wait until he has walked by. there is no guarantee that the invitation will remain on the table on another occasion.

And so this is an urgent decision. Jesus today invites you. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, invites you. He commands you, come, follow me.

And in being the one in receipt of the invitation, you are profoundly privileged. So don't delay, don't postpone, he is walking by.

An invitation extended, a decision taken, but thirdly and finally, a new life begun. And what does the new life look like? What does following involve?

Well, in the first place, we can say that following Jesus involves a wholehearted and unreserved, undivided commitment. These men, we are told in verse 20 of Simon Peter and of Andrew, at once they left their nets and followed him.

[29 : 18] They left their nets, perhaps conscious that they may not have opportunity to return. What Jesus was demanding of them was wholehearted commitment.

They could not divide their loyalties between Jesus and, in this case, their life that they had lived up to that point. Indeed, when we read of James and John, we find them leaving not only their nets, but leaving their father also.

Immediately, we are told in verse 22, they left the boat and their father and followed him. They are not abandoning their father, they are not abandoning their duties as sons to their father, but in this leaving their boat, in this leaving of their father, a statement is being made that for them, the one who enjoys priority, the one who must have first place in their lives, the one around whom their lives must now revolve from this day forward, is not their boat, it's not their father, it is Jesus Christ.

He must be at the center of their lives. They will remain, no doubt, loyal and dutiful sons, because commitment to Jesus involves being loyal and dutiful sons, but at the heart of their life, the one who is at the heart of their affections and priorities, is to be Jesus.

And so for us, and I would address all here, but very particularly those who are young and who have their lives ahead of them, perhaps you're finishing at university or coming to the end of a time of study and you're wondering what will I do with my life?

[31 : 05] And you're imagining what your options are and you're thinking, well this profession I can earn this much, or if I do this I could go and live in this place that I like, where my friends are, and you have all kinds of criteria and ideas.

And I would challenge you that you would be willing that at the heart of your decision would be loyalty to Jesus Christ. And if that involves earning less, then so be it.

If that involves living somewhere where you wouldn't have wished to live, so be it. Jesus says to you, follow me. Leave your nets, leave your boat, leave your family.

Yes, they have their place and they are good in their place, but I am number one. I am the one who must captivate your full loyalty and unreserved and undivided commitment.

This is what the new life involves. It involves this undivided commitment to Jesus, but it involves also learning a new trade. Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John would not just be those who would observe Jesus as he goes about his business.

[32 : 17] They would not simply learn from Jesus and do nothing themselves. No, there was a trade to be learned. And what is this trade? Well, Jesus tells them, I will make you fishers of men.

This is what they are going to learn. This is the apprenticeship that they have begun to be fishers of men. And as we are persuaded as to who Jesus is, as we are brought to faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, so we are commissioned to reach others, to draw others that they in turn might become fishers of men.

The disciples will certainly learn from Jesus, but then they must fish for themselves, with his help, undoubtedly. And nothing has changed.

And so I would direct my word very particularly to those who have taken this decision to follow Jesus, and I would ask you this question, are you fishing? Have you caught anything this year?

Or last, have you even cast your net? And as I was asking the children, is there such a thing as a fisherman who never catches any fish?

[33 : 33] Can such a fisherman be worthy of the title? Or at the very least, a fisherman must cast his net? And if having cast his net and he pulls it in, there's no fish, well so be it.

But the net has been cast. And so to those of us who by grace have been able to respond to this privileged invitation to follow Jesus, the question is laid before us.

Have we learned our trade? Have we completed the apprenticeship? Or do we continue to be those who observe Jesus and study his methods and consider how he does it and yet never doing it?

ourselves. Notice in the case of the disciples how their apprenticeship evolved into action, into work. In chapter 10 of the same gospel in Matthew we read he called his 12 disciples, Jesus called his 12 disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits to heal every disease and sickness and so on and so forth.

He sent them out with the following instructions. They've been learning, they've been observing, they've been serving their apprenticeship and now Jesus says it's time for you to go. time for you to fish.

[34 : 50] So following Jesus, this new life, it involves wholehearted commitment, it involves serving an apprenticeship and practicing your new trade, but finally, this new life is an unparalleled and marvelous adventure.

If we can pick up on the theme of our moderator's address, the Reverend David Meredith who was giving his address this past week, we might say that all this life that we are called to, it is spectacularly exciting.

Just notice what the new disciples would experience even in the first days of their new life. Then in verses 23 to 25, they're following Jesus, what do they experience, what do they see, what are they part of?

Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria. People brought to him all who were ill with various diseases and so on and so forth.

And they're in the midst of it, they're in the heart of it. This is an exciting new chapter in their lives. It certainly beats mending nets. Nothing wrong with mending nets.

[35 : 56] But if these men had been asked, what do you prefer doing? Mending nets or being part of this adventure of following Jesus, you can guarantee what their answer would have been.

It is an exciting new adventure that they have been called to. And again, I would address maybe particularly the young. And to those who are holding back from following Jesus because you fear it will be dull.

You fear it will be boring. You fear that you will miss out on the excitement. Well, you couldn't be more wrong. That is the devil's lie. There is nothing more exciting, more thrilling than following Jesus.

And so, respond to this privilege invitation that he extends to you today. Come, follow me. Perhaps to those who are older and who have hesitated from responding to the invitation, you're going with the flow.

And it can be comfortable, it can feel safe to go with the flow. But swimming against the current is where it's at. Now, maybe some will respond, well, you say it's exciting.

[37 : 05] But I know Christians whose lives are just as safe and comfortable and predictable and as boring as mine is. I know plenty Christians who are fishermen who don't fish.

Followers who follow from a distance. That is true. That is a sad truth. And perhaps there is a comparison that can be drawn in this matter of following Jesus.

We have Simon, Peter, and Andrew, and James, and John who leave their nets immediately. They follow him. And then at the end of the chapter we're told of others who the same word is used.

In verse 25, large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed him. There's a different kind of following. They're following from a distance, curious.

But when the going gets tough or when other more important things appear, they can turn aside, return to their own lives and their own agendas and their own priorities.

[38 : 06] And they miss out on the excitement, they miss out on the adventure. And it is a sad thing when as Christians we miss out on the adventure and we give a bad impression of what the Christian life is to others.

May God forgive us if we are guilty of that. So, an invitation is extended. Are you listening? A decision taken.

What will you decide? A new life to begin. What are you waiting for? Let the adventure begin. Let us pray.

God bless you. You God bless you. Thank you. You God bless you.