

FOLLOW ME
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By Pastor Stan
Matthew 4:18-25

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SERMON SERIES: MATTHEW: JESUS, THE SOVEREIGN KING

SERMON TITLE: "FOLLOW ME: THE CALL & POWER OF GOD'S KINGDOM"

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TOPIC: MATTHEW

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-- We're going through the first book of the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew. For the last month we've been dealing with Matthew's account of the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Matthew uses two chapters (Matthew chapters 3 and 4) to tell us about that beginning. In his commentary on Matthew, John MacArthur summarizes the beginning of Jesus' ministry this way - Jesus started His ministry:

After the Right Preparation (the preaching of John the Baptist)

At the Right Point (John's arrest)

In the Right Place (Galilee)

By the Right Proclamation ("Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.")

With the Right Plan (Today's passage, vv. 18-25)

-- In these verses Matthew tells us how Jesus called His Disciples and how He conducted His ministry.

I. How Jesus Called His Disciples (vv. 18-22)

-- Jesus didn't do His ministry alone. He called disciples to do ministry with Him and to eventually carry on that ministry completely.

A. The Recipients of the Call

-- This passage gives us an interesting introduction to the recipients of the call to become Jesus' Disciples. As we see here, the recipients are rather surprising. Jesus' didn't call the kinds of people that we might expect. He didn't call priests (the religious leaders). He didn't call scribes (the religious scholars). Nor did He call rabbis (the religious teachers).

Instead, Jesus made the surprising and even puzzling decision to call - fishermen. The men whom Jesus called to be the primary heralds of the Kingdom of Heaven weren't particularly religious - they had no religious credentials or influence. Indeed, they had little education of any kind. They were working class men, laborers who worked with their hands. And who sweated to make a living. Frankly, no one but Jesus would have chosen these men to become the leaders of the Church.

-- But that's the way God delights to do His work.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 <sup>For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ^{**27**}But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ^{**28**}God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ^{**29**}so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

B. The Nature of the Call (v. 19)

-- The call that Jesus' made contained both a command and a promise.

1. The Command: "Follow me."

-- The invitation, which is spoken with the authoritative voice of a command, that Jesus gives to these disciples-to-be is "Follow me." That's the core of discipleship - following Jesus. Discipleship is making Jesus the central focus of one's life. Discipleship means being with Jesus, spending time in fellowship with Him, listening to Him, learning from Him, becoming more and more like Him.

2. The Promise: "I will make you fishers of men."

-- Jesus makes a promise to those who accept the proffered invitation - that He will make them "fishers of men."

a. "Fishers of men"

-- Jesus is offering them the opportunity to make an eternal impact on the lives of people. Instead of drawing fish into their boats, they will be bringing people to Christ and into His everlasting Kingdom. That's the reason the Father has sent the Son.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

And that's the reason the Son has come to earth.

Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

b. "I will make you"

-- But notice how they will become fishers of men. Jesus says, "I will make you fishers of men." Being fishers of men is not what is commanded here. Following Jesus is the command; becoming fishers of men is the result. Becoming fishers of men is what will happen to them as they spend time with Jesus, and His passion to seek and save the lost becomes their passion as well. Becoming fishers of men is the effect that fellowship with Jesus will produce in them.

As they follow Jesus, they will see Him presented with a woman caught in adultery and about to be stoned, and they will hear Him speak words of mercy to her: "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more."

As they follow Jesus, they will see Him call out to a tax-collecting scoundrel, "Zacchaeus, come down from that tree, for today I'm going to your house." And they will see that scoundrel transformed into a new man that very day, just by being in Jesus' presence.

And as they follow Jesus, they will see a notoriously sinful woman come weeping and pouring perfume on Jesus' feet and then wipe those feet with her own hair, and they will see the shocked expressions of disgust from the religious leaders, but they will hear Jesus say to her, "Your sins are forgiven...Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

-- And as they follow and see all of this, a work of grace will be performed in their own lives and they too will become fishers of men.

C. The Response to the Call (vv. 20, 22)

-- The response to Jesus' call was remarkably decisive for both sets of brothers.

vv. 20, 22

1. The Background

-- It would be easy reading this to think that this was the first time that these men had ever met Jesus, that this stranger suddenly appears and tells them to follow him and that they don't think about it or ask any questions but just drop everything and leave it all and start following Jesus. But that isn't what happened. This was not the first time that these brothers had met or been with Jesus. And their decision to follow Jesus was not some unthinking, emotional knee-jerk response.

The Gospel of John gives us some insight into the prior relationship that these four men had already had with Jesus. Andrew, for example, had been a disciple of John the Baptist and had left John to become a follower of Jesus.

John 1:35-37, 40-42 The next day again John [the Baptist] was standing with two of his disciples [probably Andrew and the Apostle John], **³⁶** and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" **³⁷** The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ... **⁴⁰** One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. **⁴¹** He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). **⁴²** He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

-- It is also likely that Andrew, Peter, John and James were the disciples who accompanied Jesus at various events during the first year of Jesus' ministry (the year, which as we saw last week, is skipped over entirely by Matthew). For instance, these four were probably the "disciples" who were with Jesus at the wedding in Cana.

John 2:1-2, 11 On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. **²** Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ... **¹¹** This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

-- And these four were also probably the disciples who were with Jesus in Judea, during the first year of Jesus' ministry.

John 3:22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing.

-- All of this occurred during the year before Jesus appeared along the Sea of Galilee

and issued the call "Follow me."

2. The Radical Commitment

-- These men responded to that call with a radical commitment, which was absolutely necessary if the call were to be accepted. The call couldn't be accepted and life continue on as usual. To accept the call demanded a radical change in one's life - and that's exactly what these men did. They left their nets, their occupation. They had to; they couldn't continue fishing every day in the Sea of Galilee and follow Jesus throughout the surrounding countryside. Following Jesus also meant that they would be away from their families for extended periods of time, a possibility that they had most likely already discussed with their spouses and children.

We don't follow Jesus by simply adding Him on as another part of our lives. We only follow Jesus by giving up all claim on our lives and recognizing Him as the Lord who is sovereign over our lives. As Billy Graham once said, "Salvation is free, but discipleship costs everything we have." To follow Jesus you may not have to leave your occupation or travel away from your family, but you will have to deny yourself and take up a cross. To follow Jesus you will have to surrender to His lordship and seek to serve, please and honor Him first in all you do.

To follow Christ will cost you everything, but it will gain you far more. Later in Matthew, Jesus will tell the story of a man who discovers a treasure in a field and who gives everything he has in order to buy that field and possess that treasure. That treasure is the Kingdom of God. We give up everything enter that Kingdom, but what we gain is of infinitely more value.

II. Jesus Conducts His Ministry (vv. 23-25)

-- This passage concludes by telling us how Jesus conducted His public ministry after calling these disciples.

vv. 23-25

-- What we see here is that Jesus conducted a three-fold ministry.

A. Teaching (v. 23a)

-- "teaching in their synagogues"

-- A basic aspect of Jesus' ministry is going to be instructing people about truth. One of Jesus' favorite expressions is His teaching is the phrase "Truly, I say to you." In fact, next week we will start what's called "The Sermon on the Mount," but actually Matthew says that Jesus sat down on the mountain and "taught" the disciples gathered around Him. Five times in that extended teaching about the Kingdom Jesus repeats the phrase "Truly, I say to you."

B. Preaching (v. 23b)

-- "proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom"

-- At the heart of Jesus' ministry was the proclamation of the good news that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Most of the Jews in NT times were expecting the kingdom of God in some far-off future time, when the Messiah would come and rule over the nations from His throne in Jerusalem. What Jesus proclaims is that God's reign isn't something way off in the future - it's already here. The kingdom of God doesn't start when God sits on the throne in Jerusalem. It starts when God sits on the throne of our hearts. The bad news is that we come into this world with fallen, sinful natures, separated from God. The good news is that Christ has come to make the provision that forgives our sins and puts us right with God, and that provision was made when Jesus died in our place on the Cross.

C. Healing (v. 23c)

-- "and healing every disease and every affliction among the people."

-- There are at least three purposes in the healing miracles that Jesus performed throughout His ministry.

1. To Help People

-- Jesus performed miraculous healings, of course, to help people. Jesus genuinely cared about the hurts and needs of people. He was moved by people's difficulties and troubles. Later in Matthew, when Jesus encounters two blind men crying out for help, we read:

Matthew 20:34 Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him

2. To Give a Sign

-- Jesus' miracles were a sign that confirmed that He was indeed the Son of God.

John 20:30-31 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; **³¹** but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

3. To Give a Foretaste of the Future Kingdom

-- In His first coming Jesus started the Kingdom of God. When He returns, He will establish it fully throughout the entire earth. At that time our redemption will be completed - body and soul. There will be no more sickness, no more disease, no more death.

Revelation 21:4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."