



Mark 1:16-20
When Jesus Calls You

Summary: Jesus calls normal people to follow Him and become something new.

This has been another of those great weeks for me where I saw something in the text and thought, oh man, I can't wait to share that on Sunday! This week, the thing that got my attention early in my preparation is the fact that Jesus had disciples, *and He didn't need to.*

Jesus didn't *need* anyone to help Him. He didn't need people with certain skills to round out the team. If you know much about Him you probably know that He had 12 disciples, but He didn't depend on any of them. None of them were essential personnel. In fact, they argued among themselves, one turned out to be a traitor, another denied knowing Jesus, and a third openly doubted His resurrection. Overall, they were more of a liability than an asset. But Jesus had them! He wanted them. He invited them. He called them.

This morning we'll learn how that went down and we'll consider the fact that Jesus doesn't need us either, but He still wants us, He still calls us, in fact, He may be calling some of you in very particular ways, so let's dig in!

Mark 1:16 And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. **17** Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." **18** They immediately left their nets and followed Him. **19** When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also *were* in the boat mending their nets. **20** And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.

Now this might feel kind of abrupt, like Jesus just rolls up and calls these guys to drop what they're doing and follow Him. But it's not like that. Remember Mark is fast paced and he leaves out a lot of details to cut to the action.

Fortunately, the other gospels fill in the gaps and tell us that these fishermen had been among the hundreds of thousands of Jews who went out to hear John the Baptist speak in the wilderness and baptize in the Jordan River. They were there when John pointed to Jesus and called Him **the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.**

That's where Andrew and Simon met Jesus and spent some time with Him along with other early disciples like Philip and Nathaniel. Between that first meeting and this invitation to follow Him, Jesus has been making a name for Himself. He's performed His first miracle, changing water into wine at the wedding in Galilee. He's caused a scene by cleansing the Temple in Jerusalem, chasing out all the vendors pointing out that this was supposed to be

a place of prayer. He's met with Nicodemus, an important man in the upper echelons of government and explained to Him the need to be born again. He's traveled through Samaria and met with a woman coming to get water from the public well and told Her all about her sins while calling her to receive love and acceptance from God that none of her five previous husbands could provide.

When He got back home to Nazareth Jesus began teaching in the synagogues – you can think of them as Jewish churches - but the people resisted what He had to say so He moved on and finally came to Capernaum where He's reunited with these fishermen He met previously. He starts teaching publicly, on the shores of the lake down where people gather and Luke tells us He actually uses Peter's boat as a kind of floating podium because so many people are coming out to hear what He has to say. So, again, word is getting out about Jesus, He's not unknown to them.

And then, *after all this*, He turns to Simon and Andrew and James and John and calls them to follow Him.

Now, I want to emphasize that because it's a very common pattern – you hear about Jesus, then you get to know more about Him, you spend some time around Him, and one day He puts you on the spot and says, are you with Me, or not?

Yes, there are spectacular moments of conversion and transformation when people hear the gospel for the first time and respond immediately. Or God suddenly calls you to something completely new and unforeseen in your life. But most often this is how it happens: you become increasingly aware of who God is, what He's like, or what He's doing – there's a slow period of listening, thinking, reflecting, and then something leads to a transformative break, you have to make a decision: are you going to follow Jesus or not?

God's call often works this way, whether it's a call to salvation or service, it slowly eats at you and then builds into a moment of crisis or decision – perhaps through circumstances or calling – but you face the intersection and you know: now is the time to choose what I believe.

So, let's take some time to look at this idea of calling and see what we can learn. I've got seven things I'd like to point out.

First, when Jesus called these men to follow Him, it was **a call to prioritize the Kingdom of God** over family and over career. And those are two biggies. Notice, James and John left their dad in the boat in order to follow Jesus. These were also quite likely married men, perhaps they had kids. What did the rest of the family think about being left behind to look after things while you go running off with Jesus?

Well, it was probably a mixed reaction, right? Again, people knew this Jesus guy was doing some amazing things, He was a big deal. So, maybe you're excited that your loved one was called to go with Him. But there's still the same amount of work to be done at home or with

the fishing business and now there are less hands to do that work. *Is it right for them to leave their families behind?* Obviously, to Jesus, the answer was yes. And, I suspect, God took care of those families in a unique way while these men were out with Jesus. I suspect that because it's exactly what we see in other places in Scripture.

But not only was it a call to prioritize the Kingdom of God over family, it was also a call to prioritize the Kingdom over your career. Fishing was one of the few middle-class jobs in this economy. These men are not rich, but they're also not poor either. They own boats. That's a big deal. One of their families is actually able to hire other men to work for them. There's no indication business was going poorly, these men left decent jobs to follow Jesus.

I wonder, could you do the same if He called? Because, Jesus said this is exactly the kind of radical commitment He's looking for from anyone who wants to follow Him. He said in

Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.

Now, in other places Jesus says we're actually supposed to love the people in our lives, even if they're our enemies. So, this isn't a command to actually hate your family, but it's meant comparatively. The love you have for your family seems like hate compared to the priority and value you give to God. That's radical, but it's straight from the mouth of Jesus.

And, as a side note, if that's true of our love for God compared to our love for our family, what about our love for our family compared to anyone else? Should not your love for your spouse be so great as to make your relationship with anyone else seem like hate or neglect?

Well, the real point is: Yes, Jesus wants to be the greatest priority in your life – over your family, over your career, over anything and everything else. So, instead of living for your family or your job, which are not necessarily bad things, He says will you live for Me? Will you make Me your highest priority, your deepest loyalty?

Granted, that's a big question, isn't it? So, let's be honest: this requires trust. But think of those who choose to follow Christ in China, or Iran, or Afghanistan and other places that resist the gospel. For them, the call to follow Jesus is a call to leave and lose everything – your security, your family, your career path. Madeleine and I just finished listening to a phenomenal audiobook titled *Everything Sad is Untrue*. Now, I'll tell you right away, it's told from the perspective of a middle-school boy and he talks about things that young boys talk about - what you might call potty talk - but he tells you the true story of adapting to life as an Iranian refugee living in Oklahoma because his mother converted to Christ.

In Iran she had been essentially Muslim royalty able to trace her ancestors back to the prophet Muhammed. She had been a well-respected doctor and practicing Muslim. They had a nice house and thousands of years of history. But when she converted, she could no longer stay. They arrested her and told her she had one week to give up the names of

everyone she knew in the underground church or they would kill her. So, she fled, with one suitcase and her two kids. She literally left everything for the sake of Christ.

And when her son tells the story in the book and comes to the question why, why would she do that? He says, because she knew the gospel was true. He writes of all she gave up for Jesus and why and says she did it because:

It's true and more valuable than seven million dollars in gold coins, and thousands of acres of Persian countryside, and ten years of education to get a medical degree, and all your family, and a home, and the best cream puffs of Jolfa, and even maybe your life. My mom wouldn't have made the trade otherwise. If you believe it's true, that there is a God and He wants you to believe in Him and He sent His Son to die for you—then it has to take over your life. It has to be worth more than everything else, because heaven's waiting on the other side. (197)

Let me repeat that line again: *If you believe it's true, that there is a God and He wants you to believe in Him and He sent His Son to die for you—then it has to take over your life. It has to be worth more than everything else.* My friends, what is the gospel worth to you?

And let me say this – some of you may need to trust God with someone you love as they respond to His call – a spouse, a child, a roommate or friend. As Jesus calls them to come, will you encourage them to go, or try to hold them back? Will you, through your words, your actions, your attitude, or your tone, make it easier for them to follow or will you make their decision more difficult? Will you trust Jesus with them?

Well, that's a lot for our first point, so let's move on to point number two. When Jesus called these men, it was **a call to receive and become.**

This is the thing that really blows my mind - it was *a call to receive*. Now, they weren't looking for it, they weren't asking for it. They were busy at work one day, and the call to follow Jesus came to them. God wanted to do something *for them*, but they had to receive it. This is often how the call to come to Christ happens, whether in salvation or in growth. God initiates. He stirs things up. He comes to us and says I want to give to you; I want to fill you. He says abide in Me and you will bear much fruit. And He does it even when we give Him no reason to do it.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

He calls us, and takes us, just as we are - knowing all along that He plans to make something better out of us. When Jesus called these men He told them, **I will make you fishers of men.** They were not that yet, but Jesus was going to make them become.

In fact, there was nothing particularly special or worthwhile about these men. They're never mentioned as being particularly holy. They had no formal, academic training, in fact

after the Resurrection they'll be taken in for questioning by the religious authorities of their day who can't make sense of why men like this are teaching with power and authority and leading the early church. We read in

Acts 4:13 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.

Ah, yes, well that explains everything, doesn't it? But let me point something else out: these men were unspecialized. They were fisherman. Perhaps spectacularly skilled in their craft, but we're hard pressed to say that brought any unique skillsets to Team Jesus. They weren't recruited because of the teams and projects they had been on in the past or their certifications and skills. *Jesus didn't need their help.* He wasn't looking for allies to build a coalition. Church listen to me: they brought nothing to the table, *they reaped all the benefits from this arrangement* and yet they're exactly the ones Jesus wanted.

So, can God make you what you are not? Can He build you, use you as you yield to Him, abide in Him? Can you receive from Him and become what He wants you to be?

Point number three: it was **a call to participate** in God's work of grace.

It's easy to read Scripture and get focused on the what but miss the why. Yes, Jesus called these men to follow Him, but why? Because He wants to use them to reach other people. He promises to *make them fishers of men*. To use them to draw people out of the darkness of sin and into the light of life - just as a fisherman pulls a fish out of the dark depths of the sea and into the light of world.

So, it's a call with two sides: a call to follow Jesus, and a call to reach others. Remember, we receive and then reflect.

God's greatest project is to reach people with good news, to draw them into His Kingdom, and He uses people do that. He could do it alone, but He doesn't. People are His plan. He wants to use you to make a difference in the lives of other people.

And listen, that can sound overwhelming or grandiose, but it doesn't need to be. You don't have to be known by, seen by, followed by millions, or thousands, or even hundreds. You can make a local impact, and that's important - simply making an impact in your home, your community or friend group, at your job, with the few people you know, *is important*. It's significant, because individuals are important, not just crowds or masses. Whatever God is giving you to do, *is significant*. The lives He allows you to touch are enough.

Point number four, the call from Jesus was **a call to follow Him**. Later Jesus would tell His disciples, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Model yourself after My teachings, values, actions. The word translated here as *follow* means, literally, *to walk the same road*. It's a call into relationship with Jesus which again, is mind boggling, because He could have

done it without them, without us. One commentary I looked at titled this section “Jesus chooses His friends.” He was choosing, intentionally, the men he would spend the next several years with, He’s forming a community of people who will be shaped by their time with Him and their time with each other.

Point number five, the **call came at work**. Now, this is important because since the Enlightenment Western culture has sought to develop a division between the secular and the sacred. So, you can have your religion, you can have your spirituality, but it needs to stay upstairs, it’s a private matter. Downstairs we deal with science and technology and policy and civic life. And even for many Christians today, this is how life works. There’s Sunday and the things I do at church and then there’s the rest of my life and the two don’t mix.

You have to know that’s a very modern and very Western way of looking at things. Most of the world’s population around the world today and throughout history have not made that division. It’s all one for them. And it’s all one for Jesus. He showed up where these men work and said, “[Follow Me](#).”

Christian, may I ask: how does your relationship with Jesus make a difference in your life outside of church? Do you understand that your day job is not your real job? You see, if you are a citizen of the Kingdom, then there is no place you cannot serve your King.

And, if you want to change the culture or the trajectory of a nation, the solution is not simply to pray for it, or vote for it and it’s certainly not going to happen by posting or commenting on anything online.

If you want significant, durable change, go out into the world and make a difference for Jesus. Ask yourself: where are people when they have a bad day and then consider going into a field like that. How can you serve Jesus, help people, and earn a paycheck at the same time? I’ll give you some ideas.

Become a teacher – influence the next generation, see what’s happening in their lives, over hear their conversations, speak to them, encourage them, pray for them. Go into medicine – at every level from being a practitioner to running the front desk. Be a cheerful, helpful, person who feels like a breath of fresh air to a person in need because the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit is flowing through you. Go into law and policy. The pro-life movement needs lawyers, not just to argue cases before the Supreme court, but to help with all the paperwork involved in adopting babies who have been born and need a new home.

And the world needs skilled tradespeople too. People who love to work with their hands. If you need a plumber, chances are, you’re having a bad day. What if the plumber who showed up cared about you and your situation and was genuinely interested in fixing things because they knew Jesus was so busy fixing them? What if the same was true of your mechanic? Or the contractor you hired? There is no end to the ways that you can learn a trade or enter a profession and make a difference for Jesus in the lives of real people. And

when you face some difficulty from the administration, or the law, or your boss, pray to God of Daniel who demonstrated both professional excellence and personal endurance. But don't ever, ever believe that Jesus is just for Sundays.

Point number six when Jesus calls you, it is **a call to succeed**. Here, at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus tells the men **I will make you fishers of men**. After the resurrection, near the end of His time with them on earth He says, **Go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations**. And then, in the book of Revelation we read of the results:

Revelation 7:9 ... a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes

The work Jesus calls us to will be done. Not just in terms of evangelism, but whatever God is calling you to – you aim for faithfulness, He'll take care of outcomes.

Which brings us to our final point, number seven, the call of Jesus was **a call to respond**. I'm enjoying reading a series of books by CS Forester about a British naval officer named Horatio Hornblower. The books are set in the early 1800s and it's stunning to see certain aspects of life during that time, including the power of the Royal Navy to press men into service. They had the authority, granted by Parliament, to take men against their will off of merchant ships or from town, effectively kidnapping them, and put them to work on a naval ship where they could be flogged into obedience or even hung for not following orders.

Friends, Jesus wants none of that. He extends a hand to you, and says, "Come, **follow Me**." But you have to *choose* your response.

Whether that's the choice to confess your sins, repent, and follow Him for salvation, or the choice to surrender your self-determination and allow Him to direct and rule your life – the process is the same. He's not going to force you to do it. He's not going to capture you against your will. You must accept the offer.

And it's a grand offer. Jesus is saying: here's a purpose for your life, something worth pouring yourself into, something worth spending your life on. It will not be easy. These were fishermen. They were used to sweat and storms and hard work and frustrating nights when you feel like you did everything right and still didn't catch what you hoped for. Telling them they would be fishers of men didn't give the impression it would be easy. But it would be worth it. It would be significant. It would be done for and with Jesus. And that was enough. **They immediately left their nets and followed Him**.

I hope you'll do the same. I hope you'll follow Jesus. Wherever He calls. Wherever He leads.

Let's pray.

Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Mark 1:16-20 When Jesus Calls You

Summary: Jesus calls normal people to follow Him and become something new.

- Jesus wanted disciples, but did not need them. Why is this good news? How does it affect you personally?
- The book *Everything Sad is Untrue* explains an Iranian refugee's faith this way: *If you believe it's true, that there is a God and He wants you to believe in Him and He sent His Son to die for you—then it has to take over your life. It has to be worth more than everything else.*
 - o How does your Christian faith take over your whole life? Where do you struggle to see it as “worth more than anything else.”
 - o What are the benefits of being persecuted for your faith? What are the drawbacks?
- What did Jesus gain by having the disciples follow Him? What did it cost Him?
 - o What did the disciples gain?
 - o What did it cost them?
 - o What does following Jesus cost you?
 - o What do you gain?
- What was the draw for these men, why was Jesus' call so compelling? Was it the possibility of time with Jesus or the chance to impact others? Both?
- Jesus promised to make the disciples fishers of men. What has He made you? What is He making you? Where and how do you see His transformative influence in your life?
- Jesus called these men while they were at work. Where do you see a tendency to separate your 'church life' from the rest of your life? Do you fight it, or accept it?
 - o In what ways do you see the eternal impact of the work you do, or how you do it?
 - o What does it mean that “your significance comes from your Ruler, not your role?”
- Jesus calls us to participate in spreading the good news of what He has done. Does this feel like a burden or an opportunity to you? What does this participation look like in your life?