

Jesus' Call
Matthew 4:18-22; 9:9-13

Introduction:

Christians are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ. For most of us that is nothing new. The Church, as we heard several weeks ago, is commanded by Jesus Christ to make disciples of Jesus Christ. However, fulfilling that command is never as easy as it sounds. Discipleship tends towards extremes, which in turn makes unbalanced disciples. For example, there are:

- 1) **Well-fed disciples:** These are Christians who take the Bible seriously. They want to fulfill what the word "disciple" literally means, "pupil." They are students of the Word. These are Christians who measure their maturity by the number of hours they can listen to sermons. You might say that they are the spiritual equivalent of Jeopardy game show masters—knowledgeable about everything, yet having little, practical usefulness in the Kingdom of God. Their heads are filled with knowledge, but their hands and feet have atrophied for lack of use. One wonders if the Kingdom of God will ever reach outside the walls of their worship service or bible study.
- 2) **Well, let's-get-busy disciples:** These are Christians who take the command to make disciples seriously. They want to change the world by bringing the Kingdom of God to this earth. These are Christians who measure their maturity by the impact they can visibly measure in the world in numbers, new-construction, nickels and noise. You might say that they are the spiritual version of "restless-leg syndrome, never able to stop and always on the go to make an impact for Christ. These disciples have bulging muscles, but empty heads. It's no wonder their impact, though visible, is often akin to a battle field.

The truth is discipleship requires both learning and doing. **To follow Jesus is to learn about the Kingdom he brings and it is to labor for the Kingdom to come.** Disciples are both **students** and **practitioners** of the Kingdom of God.

Main Idea: Discipleship requires our whole-self to be engaged to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom he brings.

In the passages we read this morning, Jesus calls his first disciples. And while this call is to those who will become apostles, it is not exclusive to the apostolic mission. That call will come later. So, the call Jesus gives here to Peter and Andrew, James and John and Matthew is one that he gives to all of us. It is the call to discipleship that requires us 1) to hear, 2) to leave and 3) to follow. **In other words, our whole-self must respond to all of what Jesus offers.**

FCF summary: I think the failure of disciples to have a complete, full engagement with Christ and the Kingdom is the major reason why disciples today have so little impact in the world around us. Yes, there are those who know lots about the Kingdom. And, there are those who seek to labor much for the Kingdom. The problem is that those who are *learning are not laboring* and those who are *laboring have not learned*. The answer lies in having our **whole-self respond to Jesus' call**, not just the part we prefer.

Therefore, what we see in these disciples is a **totalizing response** to the Gospel, one that forms the pattern for our lives too! **What does true discipleship look like? What does it mean to wholly respond to Jesus' call?** It means we must **1) Hear Jesus call rightly; 2) Leave what is behind; 3) Follow Jesus solely.** This morning I want to walk us through what this hearing, leaving and following looks like.

1) Hearing rightly: We will not hear Jesus' call unless we are deeply aware that something is wrong (9:9-13)

Jesus specifically describes his mission as one of calling in verse 13 of chapter 9, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." This calling he gives to Peter and Andrew, James and John and Matthew. But it is Matthew, who as a tax collector makes illustrates this most clearly.

Tax collectors were hated by the Jewish people, especially the religious leaders. Tax collectors like Matthew were seen to be both spiritually unclean because of their compromise with the Romans and blatantly sinful because they defrauded the people through higher taxation.

- **Who Jesus Calls:** Yet, this is the person Jesus holds up as representing the kind of person he came to call. **Jesus came to call the sinners of the world.** In verse 12 he calls them the "sick." Like a physician, though well-trained and healthy, spends his days serving the sick, so Jesus spends his days healing the sinners of this world.
- **Who Doesn't Hear:** It is for this reason that **the religious**, what Jesus calls "the righteous" do not hear Jesus' call. The religiously successful do not hear Jesus' call because they do not think Jesus offers anything to them. Why?

The religious think that law-keeping is the way to do away with sin. Do what God commands and you're safe. The religious are those who actually think they are pretty good at keeping God's commandments. That was just as-much true in Jesus' day as it is today.

Nevertheless, the religious fail to take the penetrating message of the Law seriously. They only want to deal with the externals of obedience. But, the intent of God's law was never to have merely a superficial, external obedience. Rather, God's commandments require both an inward and outward obedience. The Law requires all of who we are to do all of what God commands—mind, heart and body.

Therefore, **the ultimate purpose of God's Law is not to give us a way of saving ourselves, but rather a mirror to show us that we are in need of salvation.** The purpose of the Law was to lead us to a place of need, not self-sufficiency.

- **Have I Heard:** The test of whether we have heard Jesus' call or not will be illustrated by the category of person we perceive for our selves. Are we among the sinners or among the religious?

Application:

This last point is so important because I doubt any of us here would claim to be sinless. Neither would the Pharisees have made that claim. The issue at hand is not whether we see ourselves to have sinned, but whether or not we see ourselves to be among the "sinners" of the world. With whom is our common bond naturally? Are we truly among the broken, sick, destitute, addicted, prostituting, sexually immoral, homosexual struggler, criminal, etc.?

Jesus' point in the call of Matthew is to show that his call can be heard by only one kind of person—the person who needs him. That person is the one who has begun to come to terms with themselves. These are those who know something is deeply wrong. **As long as you go on thinking everything is fine or can be managed, you will never become a disciple. The only people who become disciples are those who come because they have no other options left.**

2) Leaving what is behind: We will not leave unless we are drawn by the prospect of something greater (4:18-22)

All our disciples leave something behind in order to follow after Jesus. Peter, Andrew, James and John are all fishermen. They leave behind their vocations and their families. Matthew is a tax collector who leaves behind a life of crime.

It is sometimes thought that these guys simply dropped everything and followed Jesus with no real understanding of Jesus' person or his mission. However, when we compare the Gospels we learn that Jesus had had numerous interactions with these men already. Going back to the ministry of John the Baptist, we know Andrew had been his disciple. It was through John's ministry that Andrew had met Jesus. And, it was Andrew who first introduced Peter to Jesus. **Therefore, the decision to leave their old life behind was not an impulsive or careless decision. Rather, it was not informed by the prospect of what John the Baptist had predicted and Jesus had begun to fulfill—the Kingdom of Heaven.**

Through Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of Heaven or the reign of God's grace was coming to earth. **It was the Kingdom that Jesus offered that enabled them to leave their old ways behind. In other words, what was coming was better than what was behind.** That prospect is summed up in Jesus' promise that he would change their lives from "fishers of fish" to "fishers of men." These disciples would be so impacted by the Kingdom that it would have visible effects in the people of this world.

The Kingdom of God is the prospect of a world being reconciled to God and to itself in the saving work of Jesus Christ. **It was the prospect of being a participant in the ministry of the Kingdom that compelled these disciples to leave behind their former life.**

Application:

What about us? We often think it is easy to apply this passage to someone going into vocational ministry. However, as I said earlier, these words are for all of Jesus' disciples. All of us must leave behind our former manner of life in very real ways at the prospect of investing our lives in the Kingdom, because we see it is the only thing which truly brings life to this world.

"In my travels reporting for this book, I've continually been struck by how much of American life is an attempt to live out a dream. Albert Einstein famously said that imagination is more important than knowledge, and anybody can see that Americans have a talent for fantasy. The suburbs themselves were built as conservative utopias. Children are raised with visions of ideal lives." (David Brooks, On Paradise Drive, pp. 246-7).

It is truly valuing the Kingdom of Heaven that enables us to leave...

- Our petty concerns and jealousies
- Our private obsessions/addictions
- Our personal ambitions

The Kingdom does not remove us from our other callings, but reorients each of them so that they are all in service of the greater mission of the Kingdom. You will never leave your old life behind until you recognize that what Jesus is bringing is far better. The disciple is the person who has realized that what I formerly thought to be life was only illusory, ephemeral. True life is found only in what the Kingdom of God brings.

3) Following: We will not follow unless we recognize the Kingdom is found only in Jesus (4:19; 9:9)

A life of discipleship is not finally sealed until we clearly devote ourselves to the person of Jesus. **We are drawn by the prospect of the Kingdom, but it is Jesus whom we follow.** To all disciples Jesus says, "Follow me..." Discipleship must be Jesus-centered before it can be Kingdom-centered. There are two reasons for this:

- **Jesus' word creates what he commands:** The very act of Jesus' word has within it the very power to compel our response. **We follow because he calls!**

"The gift of self is not something we can work up inside. It is something that comes to us with the kingdom force from the Word that is spoken to us...Disciples who hear Jesus' Word...find new power to will, and will power to leave what they should leave" (F. D. Bruner). The call of Jesus creates what he commands—our following response to him. The grace Jesus offers is the very grace that makes us delight to follow him.

Question: Why did I become a disciple? Why do I want to follow? Why did I hear? Why did I leave?

- **Jesus embodies what he promises:** We "walk through-the-door" with Jesus Christ when we not only want what he promises, but discover that what Jesus holds forth is ultimately found in him alone. He is the answer. The Kingdom only comes because Jesus has come.

Discipleship is about following Jesus, not just the ideals of Jesus or the philosophy of Jesus or the example of Jesus or the theology of Jesus. In other words, it is not enough to say that you simply "believe" in Jesus. You must commit your life to him. John Piper is insightful on this point:

"...we are surrounded by unconverted people who think they do believe in Jesus. Drunks on the street say they believe. Unmarried couples sleeping together say they believe. Elderly people who haven't sought worship or fellowship for forty years say they believe. All kinds of lukewarm, world-loving church attenders say they believe. The world abounds with millions of unconverted people who say they believe in Jesus... It does no good to tell these people to believe in the Lord Jesus. The phrase is empty." John Piper

Conclusion:

Rightly understood then, the call of discipleship does not force us to choose between learning and doing. Jesus' call requires us to be both students and practitioners as we hear, leave and follow. In other words, we are not disciples until our whole-self has run after Jesus Christ. Perhaps herein lays the vision of the local church—a group of called disciples who have

- 1) Heard Jesus call them in their needy condition
- 2) Left their private selves for the a Kingdom promise
- 3) Begun to follow after Jesus Christ alone