

Matthew 4:18-22 (Part II)

Remember all that we looked at in our last study on these verses? Well, this week we're going to forget about everything that Mark, and Luke, and John had to say, and we're going to listen to *Matthew*. And in light of what Matthew has *not included* in his account, and in light of how Matthew has *carefully crafted* his account with parallelism, we can see that Matthew includes this story because he wants to teach us what *all true discipleship* requires. For Matthew, this story gives us a model and a pattern against which all other claims to discipleship can be measured.

Matthew 4:18-22 – While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

This is dizzying. If we read these verses honestly and thoughtfully, they really do take our breath away. And so I'm left at the end of these five short verses asking myself: “What just happened?” Well, let's go back and take another, closer look.

Verses 18 & 21 – While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen... And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets.

Matthew really paints for us a very vivid picture. He doesn't just say that Jesus saw Simon and Andrew fishing – he says that Jesus actually saw them *casting* the net into the sea. The Greek word for “net” here is different from the word for nets in verse 20. Verse 20 has the generic word for “nets” so that it can refer to nets of any kind. But here Matthew uses the more technical term “casting net” (“he saw two brothers casting a casting net into the sea”). In other words, this wasn't a “drag net” (cf. 13:47) that would be pulled behind the boat, but rather a circular net with a weighted edge that would be thrown out flat onto the water. When the weighted edge reached the bottom, it would then be drawn together, trapping any fish that were underneath (cf. Morris). This is what Jesus saw Simon and Andrew doing as he walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. And, of course, the reason they were casting their net into the sea is because they were fishermen. This is what they did, day in and day out. It was their routine, their livelihood. This was their life. How many thousands of times had they cast their net into the sea? And by the way, there is nothing wrong with this picture. These are just two brothers working hard to make an honest living.

And then there are James and John. Matthew tells us not just that they were busy mending the nets, but that they were sitting in the boat with their father, mending the nets. The NIV says that they were “preparing” the nets and this is probably the best translation. Preparing the nets would include cleaning the nets, repairing any tears, and folding them up so the nets would be ready to

cast again. This is what Jesus saw James and John doing. So these brothers, too, are occupied with the regular, everyday work of the family business. How many times in their life had they prepared the nets for another cast? How many different things had they talked about with their father and each other while they worked? Matthew really does paint for us a very simple and a very vivid picture of life as usual for four hardworking fishermen. And it's into this picture that Jesus walked one day almost 2000 years ago.

Verses 19 & 20f – And he said to [Simon and Andrew], “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men”... and he called [James and John].

Now the part about being fishers of men is a very important point and it's something we'll come back to in chapter 10. “Fishers of men” has to do with what we could call “apostleship” because an apostle is a “sent one” – one sent out on a mission to fish for men. But the thing Matthew *most* wants to focus our attention on here in *this* story is not the theme of “apostleship”, but the theme of discipleship. We could say that if apostles are the “sent ones” (those sent out on a mission), disciples are the “called ones” – those called to follow after Jesus.

But what's this about a “*call*”? There were plenty of “disciples” in Jesus' day who followed various Rabbis and Jewish teachers, but it wasn't because they were called, or even because they were invited. No, they actually went and *sought* permission to follow the master of *their* own choice. They took the initiative to choose their own teacher. So in the normal world of following cultural protocol and etiquette, this story would never have happened – Jesus would never have done this! But here Jesus is, standing on the beach and interrupting you right in the middle of your day's work – calling you to follow after Him! Jesus came to them. They did not go to Jesus. And perhaps even more amazing is that Jesus didn't just extend to them an optional invitation, He *summoned* them. Jesus *commanded* them saying, “follow me.” This is simply unheard of! No Jewish teacher did this, and even if he did have the “audacity” to do this, it's highly unlikely that anyone would have actually got up and followed. And especially not if he called people who were in the middle of casting their net for a catch of fish or busy preparing their nets for the next cast. But this is *exactly* what Jesus has done. Jesus has come, unannounced and unlooked for, to four fishermen on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and commanded them to drop everything, leave their work and family, and follow Him. It *is* stunning. But how will these four fishermen respond?

Verses 20 & 22 – *Immediately* [Simon and Andrew] *left* their nets and *followed him*...
Immediately [James and John] *left* the boat and their father and *followed him*.

Why? ... *WHY*? Why did they follow Jesus? Why *immediately*? Why did they leave work and family? How are we to *explain* this? As I thought about this, I was reminded of the disciples' awestruck question: “Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?” (Luke 8:28). I think that here we would also be right to ask: “Who then is this, that he commands four fishermen to follow Him and they obey him?” ***Who then is this?***

Well we know that He must not be just a nice and good man with an inviting and friendly and charismatic personality. This could not possibly explain the *immediate* response of these four

fishermen and especially under the circumstances. If we really think about it, we'll have to admit that there must be something inherent in Jesus' voice, in His manner and demeanor, in His presence. There must be a compelling authority and majesty in His call. Indeed, "The call of God through Jesus is sovereign and absolute in its authority" (Hagner). And the sovereign and absolute authority of Jesus' call is not the kind that forces these fishermen to obey against their will, but rather the kind that irresistibly draws them to obey of their own free will. Jesus will later remind the disciples: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (John 15:16).

Who then is this, that he commands four fishermen to follow Him and they freely and willingly choose to drop everything, leave everything, and follow Him? He is Jesus. The one who calls with sovereign and absolute authority and yet the one who will also lay down His life for those whom He has called.

We see that Matthew's purpose in telling this story is not for us to respond by saying, "That's really amazing and wonderful. I really admire them. There sure are some extraordinary people in the world." As we said earlier, it is clear from how Matthew has carefully crafted his account that he is giving us a model and a pattern against which all other claims to discipleship can be measured. Matthew's purpose in telling this story is to show us that when Jesus calls *us*, our response can only be immediate and absolute. And this will always mean a complete and total break with old loyalties – including even our own flesh and blood – as we leave everything to follow after Jesus. Yes, this break will look different in different people's lives, but there *must* be a fundamental, radical reorientation of a person's priorities. No longer does family come first. Jesus comes first. No longer does work come first. Jesus comes first. And so Matthew wants us to see that in the *same* way that the first disciples were called and responded, so we also are called to respond. (cf. Hagner).

It could be tempting for us to try and take "comfort" in the fact Jesus doesn't literally require the same thing of us that He required of the disciples (leaving work, family, *everything* to follow Jesus). But can we really find any "comfort" in this kind of thinking? Not at all! In fact, when we think this way, it only proves that we haven't yet made that total break with our old loyalties. We have not yet reoriented our priorities in the radical way that Jesus demands. When one man reflected on Jesus' requirement that the rich young ruler sell all his possessions and give them to the poor, he said something like this: That Jesus does not require *all* his followers to sell all their possessions gives comfort only to those who *would* be required to sell all their possessions" (Robert Gundry). In other words, it is true that Jesus doesn't come to *everyone* and call them to literally drop everything they're doing in order to follow after Him. But the only ones who could possibly find any "comfort" in this fact are the very ones that Jesus *would* require to literally drop everything in order to follow after Him!

Matthew's point is that when Jesus calls us, *just like* when He called those four fishermen on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, our response *must* be an immediate, radical, absolute, all-encompassing decision to follow after Him. Why is this? Because anything less than this is proof that we are still choosing to be ignorant of His absolute and sovereign authority over all. *This* is what the inspired apostle Matthew wants us to know. And, of course, Matthew knows this as well as any because his own story is almost exactly the same as these four fishermen: "As Jesus

passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he rose and followed him" (Matthew 9:9).

If you think about following after Jesus, it really is a very practical and powerful picture. To follow Jesus means that we are at all times watching Him and so we are at all times learning from Him and imitating Him and becoming always more and more like Him. Jesus describes this "following" in great detail in the Sermon on the Mount. But I think what Matthew wants us to see here is that all true discipleship *begins* with the sovereign and absolute call of Jesus upon our lives and requires nothing less from us than an immediate and complete break with our former life as we follow not just after an ideal or a lofty code of ethics, but after a *person*, a *man*, Jesus the Nazarene, the Son of God who gave His life for us. Apart from Jesus' sovereign and absolute summons, and apart from our free and willing and unreserved and immediate obedience to that summons by faith alone, there is no true discipleship and so we can conclude that neither is there any salvation. This is the lesson we learn. This is the sermon that Matthew is preaching to us.

So what about you? Let me ask you this question: Have you responded with willing obedience to a sovereign and absolute and gracious summons from Jesus to leave everything and follow Him? Ask yourself: Have I left everything to follow Jesus by *faith alone*, and through His *grace alone*? He laid down His life and bore God's wrath in the place of sinners so that now, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

For those of us who have heard the summons, we know that it came to us by God's grace alone and that we have willingly left everything to follow Jesus by God's grace alone. And that's exactly what enables us not to have any fear as we measure our own claims to discipleship by this model and pattern that Matthew has given us. If we are truly disciples, then we have heard not just an invitation, but a sovereign and absolute summons from Jesus. If we are truly disciples, then we have willingly and freely left everything to follow Him.

Teaching our Children

- Q. What were Simon and Andrew doing when Jesus came to them? What were James and John doing?
- A. ~ Simon and Andrew were casting their net into the Sea of Galilee because they were fishermen (Describe to your children what this would have looked like. Grab their imaginations!)
~ James and John were sitting in a boat with their father preparing the nets for the next cast (cleaning, mending, folding).
- Q. When Jesus came to Simon, Andrew, James, and John, what did He do?
- A. Jesus called them to follow Him! (Spend some time imagining this with your children.)
- Q. Why would Jesus' call have been very surprising and unexpected? How did other teachers get followers (disciples)?
- A. Other teachers did not go out and call their own disciples. Instead, a person would decide which teacher he wanted to follow and then he would go and ask for his permission.
Contrast this with John 15:16 under III. B. 3. above!
- Q. How did Jesus call His disciples? Did He suggest they follow Him or just give them an optional invitation? (This is probably what other teachers would have done if they called their own disciples.)
- A. Jesus *commanded* (summoned) these four fishermen to drop everything and follow Him.
- Q. What did Simon and Peter, and James and John do?
- A. They *immediately left* their boats and their nets, and even their father, and went to *follow* after Jesus.
- Q. Why do you think these four fishermen were so willing to do this without even any waiting or talking?!?
- A. ~ There must have been a very wonderful power and authority in Jesus' call that caused these disciples to want nothing else than to follow Jesus!
~ (Be sure to spend some time thinking and reflecting on this. Read Luke 8:28 and see III. B. above.)
- Q. When Jesus calls people today, how does He call them? What does He call them to do?
- A. ~ When Jesus calls people today, He calls them in the same way that He called the four fishermen!
~ He commands us to take all of our other loves and make sure that they are never so important that they keep us from obediently following after Jesus and making Him the #1 most important thing in our life.
- Q. But How could anyone possibly be willing to do this?
- A. Just like for the disciples, it's easy to be willing when we have heard the wonderfully amazing power and authority in Jesus' call. He makes it so that we *want* to leave everything to follow Him!

Exhort your children to follow *only* after Jesus by faith alone and through His grace alone. Lead them back to the Gospel!