

“The Calling of the First Disciples”
(Matthew 4:18-25)

Introduction: Last week we saw the beginning of Jesus’ public preaching ministry. He began to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, after John the Baptist had been taken into custody. John’s work of preparing the way had to be finished before Jesus could begin. God apparently did not want there to be two bright and shining lights at one time, so that one didn’t take away from the other. John said about Jesus, “He must increase, while I must decrease” (John 3:30), that is, Jesus must become more important and central, while John must disappear into the background. And so while John was moving off the scene, Jesus was coming on. After His baptism and temptations in the wilderness, Jesus began to do His Father’s work. He performed many miracles. He drove the money changers out of the temple. And He spoke with Nicodemus and with the Samaritan woman, as well as many other Samaritans from the same city, about the new birth. But His light really began to shine when He began to publicly preach the Gospel, after John’s light was removed.

This morning, we see Jesus beginning the next stage of His ministry: making disciples. He not only came to keep the Law perfectly for His people, He not only came to lay down His life to wash away their sins,

Christ also came to make disciples.

I. First, Matthew tells us about the calling of Peter and Andrew, and James and John to be His disciples (vv. 18-22).

- A. This was one of the reasons, we saw last week, that Jesus came to live in Capernaum.
 - 1. Capernaum was right off the shore of the Sea of Galilee, in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali.
 - a. Jesus came here to fulfill prophecy.
 - b. But Capernaum was also where these four men were living at this time.
 - 2. Jesus went out to walk by the Sea. And as He did, He saw two brothers, Peter and Andrew.
 - a. They were casting their nets into the water for they were fishermen.
 - b. But Jesus told them that He had a higher calling for them. He said, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (v. 19).
 - c. Now God had done the same thing with David, many years ago. He had taken him from his calling as a shepherd of sheep, to make him the shepherd of His people (Ps. 78:70-71).
 - (i) Oftentimes the Lord will prepare us for service in His kingdom, by having us do the same thing first in a secular calling. He will have us do it as a job, before we do it as a ministry.
 - (ii) David was good at taking care of sheep. God then gave him the job of taking care of Israel.

- (iii) God may prepare you to serve Him in the same way.
 - (iv) Some children who have grown up loving airplanes, have become His servants flying food and medicine to supply missionaries in other countries.
 - (v) Some children who have enjoyed pretending they were preachers, grew up to be ministers.
 - (vi) Take a look at what it is that you like to do. Maybe the Lord will use that desire of yours someday in His kingdom to do His work. At least, that is what you should be praying that He will do.
 - (vii) And even if what you are doing is not done specifically for the church, it can still be used as a ministry and as a means of advancing His kingdom, if it is done for God's glory.
 - (viii) These men were fishermen. They made a living by catching fish. But now Jesus was going to use their talent in His kingdom, by having them catch men.
- d. And so Jesus called them. And, "They immediately left the nets and followed Him" (v. 20).
- (i) Sometimes it is difficult to know when God is calling. And sometimes when you are sure that He is, you can begin to doubt whether He ever called you in the first place.
 - (ii) Certainly all of us are to be using the gifts He has given us to serve the Lord wherever we are and whatever we are doing.
 - (iii) But when the Lord shows us that He has a special purpose for our lives, we must be ready, even as the disciples were, to leave everything at once and follow Him.
3. Well, Jesus went a little farther and saw two other brothers, James and John.
- a. They were in the boat with their father, Zebedee.
 - b. They weren't fishing, but they were working on their nets, getting them ready to go out fishing.
 - c. Jesus also called them, and they too immediately left the boat and their father, and followed Him.
 - d. Mark adds one other detail about this incident. He says that "they left their father Zebedee in the ship *with the hired servants*" (1:20). This shows that the family that James and John were from was well-to-do. We find out in John's Gospel that John even knew the high priest (John 18:15-16).
- B. Now, when you're reading through the Gospels, this can be confusing.
1. I don't know if you have ever noticed, but there are at least three times when the disciples are called by Jesus.
 - a. The first time is in John 1:35-42. And I would like to read it for you, so you can see the differences. It takes place in the context of John the Baptist's ministry. John the apostle writes, "Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and *said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God!' And the two disciples heard him speak, and they

followed Jesus. And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and *said to them, ‘What do you seek?’ And they said to Him, ‘Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?’ He *said to them, ‘Come, and you will see.’ They came therefore and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John *speak*, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He *found first his own brother Simon, and *said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which translated means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, ‘You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter).”

- b. Now is this the same event that we have just read? No. Think about a few of the differences.
- (i) This event which John writes of took place in Judea, where John was baptizing. Matthew’s account takes place by the Sea of Galilee, which was much further north.
 - (ii) In John’s account, Andrew, with another disciple of John the Baptist, asked Jesus where He was staying, and then Jesus told them to come and see. And so they went and stayed with Him that day. In Matthew’s account, Jesus calls Andrew while he was at the Sea casting a net into the water.
 - (iii) In John’s account, Andrew came to Christ first, and then went and found Peter to tell him about Jesus. In Matthew’s record, Jesus came to Andrew and Peter, while they were together.
 - (iv) These are clearly two different events.
- c. But there is one other place where these disciples are called, and that is in Luke 5:1-10.
- (i) Here, Jesus is speaking to a multitude of people by the Sea, and they are all pressing in on Him, so that He needs to get into a boat.
 - (ii) The boat that He gets into is Peter’s. And after Peter puts out a little way from the land at Jesus’ request, He sits down and teaches the people.
 - (iii) But when this is done, Jesus says to Peter, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch” (v. 4).
 - (iv) At first, Peter very politely objects. But then he does as Jesus asks. When he and Andrew do this, they gather in such a large catch that their nets began to tear. Both boats were filled, and they almost sank.
 - (v) At this point, Peter says, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (v. 8). But Jesus says, “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men” (v. 10). “And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him” (v. 11).
 - (vi) This appears to be a third time that Jesus calls them. Notice that in Luke’s account there is a large crowd of people, but in Matthew’s, there are no others except Jesus only. In Luke’s account, Jesus calls them after first performing the miracle of filling their nets with fish. But in Matthew’s, there was no miracle mentioned. In Luke’s account, both pairs of fishermen had gotten out of the boat and were washing their nets. But

in Matthew, one pair was casting their net and the other was mending theirs. Again, this seems to be the third time that Jesus called them.

2. But we shouldn't think that this is strange.
 - a. Jesus was preparing them step by step for their calling.
 - b. When they were with John the Baptist, they first became interested in knowing more about Him. They began to follow Him, as others were doing.
 - c. They apparently followed Him back to Capernaum, which is where they lived and where He settled down. Jesus, remember, didn't have a house of His own. He was probably staying with Peter in His house. Then a second call came to them early on in His ministry in Galilee, which is the one we are reading of here. He called them, and they left their nets to follow Him.
 - d. And then finally, He called them to leave their homes and occupations for good. In Luke we read, "And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him" (5:11).
 - e. When the Lord calls, He often does so in stages. When He brings you to Himself, He doesn't always require that you give up everything you have. And when He does call you to give up everything, often it is not immediately. Sometimes He does. In some countries, such as Islamic countries, if you come to Christ, it means that you are giving up everything, including, sometimes, even your own life. But whether He asks you to surrender all to Him at once, or not, you must still count everything as loss for the sake of Christ. You must be willing at a moment's notice to let go of everything to follow Him.
- C. But I want you to notice two other things about Jesus' gathering of His disciples.
1. Look at who it is that Christ called.
 - a. He did not go to Herod's royal court to gather His disciples. Nor did He go to Jerusalem, to the chief priest and elders of the people, nor to those who were the most educated in the law.
 - b. Instead, He went to the Sea, to call common fishermen to the highest calling in all of God's kingdom.
 - c. Christ calls common men. He could have just as easily called Annas and Caiphas. His grace could have changed their hearts just as easily. But God chooses "the foolish things of the world to shame the wise" and "the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong" (1 Cor. 1:27).
 - d. You should not worry that you are not the strongest, or the wisest, or the best educated. God calls very few like this into His kingdom. Look at what He was able to do with a few common fishermen. God is willing to use those who are weak, in order that He might reveal His own strength. He wants others to see that it is not the power of men, but the power of God.
 - e. But the one thing you do need is a willing heart, a heart that is willing to give everything you are and will ever be to Him. He doesn't want you to hold on to anything as your own. He doesn't want you to have a certain area of sin or something of the world that you are not willing to give up. You must give up everything, if you are going to be His disciple. Jesus says to you, as He said

to His disciples long ago, “If you want to come after Me, deny yourself, and take up your cross, and follow Me. For if you wish to save your life, you shall lose it; but if you lose your life for My sake, you shall find it” (Matt. 16:24-25).

- f. Have you done so this morning? Are you Christ’s, and His alone? Or are you still running your own life, and following your own plans? Are you doing the things you do because Christ wants you to, or because that is what you want to do? Jesus says that you need to surrender everything to Him. You need to leave your own desires behind, pick up your cross -- the instrument of your ultimate self-denial--, and follow Him in whatever He tells you to do, and in wherever He tells you to go.
 - g. This requires a strength which is greater that you have. If you don’t have it, you know that it does. You need the strength of Christ. If you haven’t received Christ this morning, I would invite you to come to Him now and receive from Him His life and His strength, so that you might give yourself to Him, so that you might live and do His will.
2. And then what you need to do is follow Him.
 - a. Notice that Jesus told His disciples to follow Him. This means more than that they were just supposed to walk behind Him and follow Him from city to city.
 - b. What it means is that they were to learn from Him and imitate everything that He did. They were not only to do the things which He did, but they were also to think His thoughts and to have the same kind of heart that He had. Jesus said in our Scripture reading this morning, “It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master” (Matt. 10:25).
 - c. This is what it means to be a disciple. A disciple is a learner. He is one who sits under another and becomes like Him. The Bible says that all of you who have trusted in Jesus, have been predestined to become conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29). This means that it is God’s plan for you to be just like Him, to follow Him in whatever He does.
 - d. This is also what it means to be a Christian. The word “Christian” means “one who follows Christ,” and that is what a disciple is. Luke writes, “And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11:26).
 - e. And so you are exhorted this morning to take Christ’s yoke upon yourself and learn from Him. He was meek and humble in heart. You should be as well. He was merciful and kind. You should be too. He was holy and had fully set Himself apart for the Father’s will. So should you. May God grant you the grace to do these things.

II. But there is one other brief point in our passage this morning. Jesus also showed by what He did, who He was (vv. 23-25).

- A. This was His first trip around Galilee.
 1. Jesus taught in their synagogues, which were the places in which Jews worshiped. It was said that in Jerusalem alone, there were nearly five hundred synagogues.

2. Jesus also preached the Gospel of the kingdom. The kingdom was near. They must repent and believe the message.
 3. And Jesus healed every kind of sickness and disease.
 - a. The news was getting out that He could help sick people. It traveled as far north as Syria.
 - b. And so they were bringing to Him all who were sick.
 - c. Notice that Jesus was able to heal even the most severe sicknesses.
 - (i) He healed the paralytics: those who could not move parts of their physical bodies.
 - (ii) He healed lunatics, here translated “epileptics”: those who had problems with their minds.
 - (iii) And He healed demoniacs: those who were possessed in their souls with evil spirits.
 - (iv) But Jesus healed bodies, minds and souls, to show the people that His kingdom is greater than all sickness and all the power of the enemy. This also showed who He was: a divine messenger from God, for no one can do the works Jesus did, unless God is with Him (John 3:2).
- B. The result was that great multitudes were following Him.
1. The things Jesus was doing was meant to stop traffic, and that is exactly what it did.
 2. Many were terrified and stared in amazement as He healed and cast out demons.
 3. And what was the purpose? Why did Jesus want to get their attention? Why was it so important that they believe that He was from God? It was so He could tell them God’s message. It was so He could teach them.
 4. And so what comes next is one of the longest recorded sermons which Jesus ever preached.
 - a. Jesus wants us to take His yoke upon us, so that we might learn of Him.
 - b. In this sermon, He teaches us a great deal about what it is that He wants us to be, and what it is He wants us to do.
 - c. This is what we will want to begin to look at next week. But for now, let us bow and pray that the Lord will help each of us here to follow Jesus wherever He may lead us.