July 5, 2015

“The Call of Discipleship”

Matthew 4:18-22

**FCF**: Confusion as to what it means to follow Christ

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) The King has come.

(magnet) We are called to follow Him.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

There’s much confusion about what it means to follow Christ. Think of the broader culture. A few weeks ago, the AIM crew watched and discussed the documentary, *Lord, Save Us from Your Followers*. A key scene of the film was a man-on-the-street interview asking folks about their impression of Christians. The response (READ quote): “*To be holy; fanaticism; going to church; warfare; trying to get other people to become Christians; love thy neighbor*.”

All of which is insightful but discouraging. Well, what about within the ranks? How would Christians themselves answer the question as to what it means to follow Christ? Interviews won’t help you on this. You need to watch, listen, and observe. Again, this might be insightful. But, in many cases, it will likely prove to be just as discouraging. Maybe more so.

There’s much confusion about what it means to follow Christ. Well, what does it mean?

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Matthew 4:18-22

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

At the Yigal Allon Center on the NW corner of the Sea of Galilee, you can see the “Jesus Boat” – an ancient fishing boat from the 1st century discovered in 1986. It’s 27’ long and 7.5’ wide, could hold 15 people, had fore and aft decks, a central mast and sail, with positions for oars on both sides. There’s no tie to Jesus or the disciples. But it’s the kind we read of here.

My point? These are historical events that took place in time and space. And into that historical context came Jesus of Nazareth of whom His genealogy said He is the Son of David, of whose arrival in this world the nations and creation heralded, and of whom the prophets spoke.

His message? (READ Matthew 4:17b) Then at the earliest stage of His ministry, Jesus gathered followers. Not from among the religious at the Temple in Jerusalem, the self-assured and self-righteousness, but from among the masses, ordinary fishermen there along the shore.

As we read this account, what do we see? What do we observe? The King has come. The King has come. And we are called to follow Him. There are three things we learn about His call. First, the nature of the call. Second, the results of the call. Third, the response to the call.

1. **THE NATURE OF THE CALL**

So, first, the nature of the call. What does it mean? What’s behind it?

1. *The Plain Meaning*
2. Not passive

We need to understand the times. You see, the custom was to listen to and learn from the rabbi.

1. But active

It was passive. But with Jesus, it is much more active and engaged. We are to follow Him. Literally, “to come behind” – not walking out in front or beside but behind. To watch, listen, and observe. And then to go where and as He goes. Not just to listen and learn but to go and do.

1. *The Raw Authority*

We need to understand the plain meaning of the call. And the raw authority behind it.

1. Not passive

It’s also worth knowing that the custom was for the student to choose his rabbi.

1. But active

The rabbi would passively wait. But Jesus is the one actively taking the initiative. He issues not an invitation but a command. With insistence. There is no sense in which Jesus sees this path as being one in a list good options. From Jesus’ perspective, this is really the only option.

That’s the nature of the call – both the plain meaning and the raw authority.

*Application:*

It’s the same call today – to follow. And with the same authority – from the Son of God Himself. It’s not to be nuanced or negotiated. It’s not to be debated or dismissed. It’s not to be evaded or ignored. Just as Jesus said then to them, “Follow me,” so He says today to us.

The King has come. And we are called to follow Him.

1. **THE RESULT OF THE CALL**

Which takes us to the result of the call. What will this mean? What will it look like?

1. *Radical Change*
2. Still fishing

It brings radical change. Yes, the disciples will still be fishing. The past lessons and experience will be helpful. Just as David’s years as a shepherd served him well once he became king.

1. But for men

But they would be fishing for men. They would have a new purpose, new goals, new priorities. They would have a new loyalty and direction, grounded and driven by their passion for Christ.

1. *Steady Process*

So this call would bring a radical change to their lives. But then also a steady process.

1. Not all at once

It would not be all at once. This was not a quick fix or 10-step program to changing the world.

1. But over time

It would be over time, slow and incremental, with many seeming setbacks along the way.

Jesus was saying, “*I will take all the courage, patience, and perseverance you’ve learned on this lake – even the sense of timing and the techniques – and reform it all and you into what you need to be. And then through you, I will rescue men and women from the deep abyss of their sin and ruin.*” This is the result of the call – both a radical change and a steady process.

*Application:*

And it’s the same today. Jesus says, “Follow me” and brings radical immediate change. Jesus says, “And I will make you fishers of men” and begins a slow and steady process.

We then become the raw recruit, still in training, sent on a mission. We then become the lump of coal, still under pressure, set into the silver pendant. How can that be? It comes down to who really does the work. The One who calls us is also the One who works in and through us.

The King has come. And we are called to follow Him.

1. **THE RESPONSE TO THE CALL**

Which takes us to the response to the call. Having heard it, what does it mean to heed it?

1. *New Identity*
2. Literal leaving

It means a new identity. After all, what do these men literally leave behind? Their nets in the water and their boat on the shore. Understand that fishing was central to the Galilean economy. These men likely made a good living for that time. They are abandoning the tools of their trade.

1. Symbolic leaving

So what are they symbolically leaving behind? Their security – all they knew, what was familiar and they could count on. Their careers – the safety of their plans and a predictable future.

1. *New Community*
2. Literal leaving

It means a new identity. It also means a new community. Again, what (or who) do these men literally leave behind? Not just nets and a boat but their father standing in the boat. Family.

1. Symbolic leaving

So what are they symbolically leaving behind? In a traditional culture, so much was tied to clan and kin, to family. They would likely be opening themselves to charges of dishonoring parents.

This is the response to the call. It means taking on a new identity in a new community.

*Application:*

A couple of clarifiers here. First, some say, “*See! You don’t need training or study. Seminaries and books are a waste*.” Okay. If you have a divine mentor to guide you, go for it. Second, some say, “*See! There’s no reason to bother with old responsibilities and obligations. Cut them loose*.” Look. The other gospels mention servants that were there with Zebedee. In leaving in order to follow Jesus, these sons did not abandon their father to financial ruin.

So what then are we seeing here? Jesus is not dismissing or disposing all that made up their prior identity and community. Goodness knows He gives them to us. He’s not dismissing or disposing those things. But He will disrupt them. He will insist that all others come second. It’s as though the solar system has a new sun and all the planets must now learn their new orbits.

For the King has come. And we are called to follow Him.

**CONCLUSION:**

As we said last week, we live in times of tension, between the times, in the now and the not yet. For the kingdom has come but not yet in full. This is the clear teaching of Scripture. The decisive battle of the war has been fought and won. But the struggle is not yet over.

Think of the Robin Hood legends. King Richard has come to reclaim his throne from Prince John. But how do Robin Hood and his Merry Men respond at the sight of the king? They bow and follow him. Or think of the Narnia tales. Aslan has come to break the White Witch’s spell. But how do the Narnians respond at the sight of the Lion? They bow and follow him.

My point? Even in this time between the times, we are called to hear the King and heed His summons. Jesus is the King. And He has come. We are called to bow and follow Him.

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