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Christ's Vision for Followers

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TEXT: 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.

Recruiting is an important task. For instance, it's important in the field of athletics. I've noticed that college coaches seem to always be scouting and recruiting talented players for their various athletic programs. It's viewed as an important part of their job to build the program up. They'll visit with high school prospects and encourage them to sign on with them with promises of a good education and the enjoyment of being part of a winning team. Recruiting is important in business as well. I have read that companies and businesses are aggressively looking for people these days to fill empty positions and they're offering good wages and benefits and a healthy work environment and a promising career path in order to get people to sign on. It's also important in volunteer organizations, they can't get their mission accomplished without volunteer help, so they're always recruiting people to join them and serving various needs in the community. And they make promises as well of gaining personal satisfaction in serving others and making a difference.

Well, recruiting was obviously important to Jesus because it's one of the first things he did. Today, we see him recruiting people for his kingdom campaign. He's building his team. He called four fishermen to follow him on his mission. And to follow means to

come after someone and have them be your leader, to join with them, come with them. And along with the call Jesus, the recruiter, promised that he would make something of them. He had special and great plans for them. He actually gave them a vision of what they could become. He said, "You're fishing for fish. I will make you fishers of men." That sounds important, doesn't it? And notice these men, they weren't scholars or leaders in their communities, and they weren't known for their religiosity or talents or giftedness and not exactly what you'd call cream of the crop. Yet Jesus chose them to be His disciples, and they would eventually carry out God's purposes.

I suppose we shouldn't be surprised by this. I mean, like father, like son. Look at how God chose people in the Old Testament. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were not exactly religious holy superstars when God found them. And what about Moses, a fugitive wanted for murder in Egypt. Or Gideon, the youngest of the weakest tribe of Israel and Samson and the long haired playboy without any morals. And later on, there's David, the shepherd boy, the youngest. And then there's Amos the farmer called to preach. And the list goes on and on. Insignificant, ordinary folks called by God to do significant things for him and his kingdom. I find this rather encouraging. Because oftentimes we think that we don't have what it takes to make a difference for God in this world. We're convinced that we're too ordinary, too messed up, too unskilled, too insignificant to be of much use for God's purposes. But God's Word today reminds us again that nothing could be further from the truth. God has plans to use you in extraordinary ways as you follow Jesus. And his grandest vision for all Christ followers is that they would become fishers of people. There is a world of people out there who he loves that need to be brought into his eternal kingdom to receive the eternal life he wants to give them. They need rescuing.

And Matthew then tells us that after Jesus issued this call, the disciples left everything that they held there and followed him and gave him authority over their lives. And they began their training to become fishers of men to see that vision realized. For some reason, they jumped in with both feet. Perhaps they'd heard Jesus preaching about the kingdom earlier and had thought about it. But here they are today dedicating themselves to follow Jesus to having a relationship with Him, believing in his big fishing vision for their lives, even though they weren't even clear of what that might look like. Off they went. And it was the beginning of a great adventure that would change their lives forever and impact a world for the kingdom of God. There were exciting and positive and powerful experiences these guys went through, like watching

healing miracles and evil powers being overcome by Jesus and His power over nature and the feeding of 5000 with five loaves and two fishes, just to name a few. And there was stimulating and challenging eye-opening teaching from Jesus about God and His kingdom and how life works in that kingdom. And they were able to observe this loving, compassionate attitude Jesus had towards all kinds of people, no matter what their background was. He regularly challenged their boundaries and values as he led them around to places they would never go on their own. And they learned also where he got his strength as they saw him pray and the value of knowing God's Word and following it and everything he did. They picked up on that.

And there were also hard experiences that equipped them as well – rejection and hostility and discomfort with no place to lay their heads at night and disappointment and unmet expectations and failures and dismay at Jesus' words of warning about future hostility and persecution. The ultimate worst was seeing his horrific crucifixion on the cross, and they didn't understand until later that this was all part of God's salvation plan to pay for sin. Even though Jesus had told them he would go to the cross. And then there's the unexpected resurrection on Easter and the understanding now of who Jesus is and what he has accomplished for humanity through that life, suffering, and death and resurrection that in him, their salvation, deliverance from sin and death and the power of the devil. And they learned that he was the fulfillment of everything in their Old Testament scriptures. It all pointed to him, which now led to that vision for their lives becoming reality.

They were next commissioned to go make disciples of all people, fishers of people, just as Jesus said on day one of their adventure with Him. And you can read of these adventures in the book of Acts – of their fishing and thousands of people caught for the Kingdom of God as the Holy Spirit of God worked through them and is a witness of all the good news of what God had done for this broken, sinful world through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It was exciting and the church was on fire. The rest of their lives was devoted to fishing for men and women with the good news of Jesus. And thousands were brought in. Fishing had its good days and its bad. And it had its joys and its sorrows and its victories and its failures. It was challenging work. There was rejection and threat threats to their lives. And even martyrdom came like Jesus predicted. But they didn't quit. Their hearts were captured by Jesus and what they had witnessed as they lived with him and followed him. He was their risen Lord and Savior. So, his vision for them was at the very forefront of their minds, and they ran

with that vision as hard as they possibly could. And thanks be to God they never quit fishing because I probably wouldn't even know about Jesus and the promise of eternal life if they had.

But enough about them. Let's turn to you. There are a couple of questions as text compels me to ask you. First of all, has your heart been captured by Jesus and what he's done for you? Have you accepted his call to be one of his followers, believing in him as the savior of your life? Because he is, you know, your savior. He went to the cross as an atoning sacrifice to pay for your sins so that you might have forgiveness and a new eternal life with God that lasts forever. And He is still present. He's risen. And he's calling every individual even today, "Follow me to that new life. I am the way." And he says, "Behold, I stand at the door, knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I'll come in to him and eat with him and he with me." He's describing the intimate, close relationship with him that you can have. It's simply a matter of opening the door of your life and inviting him in to be your savior and Lord. And remember this: all authority and Heaven on Earth now belongs to him. He's lord of all. And he holds your eternal destiny in his hands. "Follow me," he says.

Next question: if you are a follower, is his vision for all followers at the forefront, the center of your day to day existence? It's a good question for every one of us as Christ followers to ask of ourselves. Because it's all too easy to lose sight of the fishing vision for us that Jesus has for us both as individuals following him and as his church. It's easy to lose our intentionality and not fish. The good news of salvation through Jesus soon becomes simply a private matter kept to ourselves. The fishing stops. We limit saying his name, the name that it stands out above every other name, to only saying it amongst ourselves. And even as a pastor, I found it all too easy to settle and be content with the truth that the numerical growth in my church is mostly transfer growth. And this is not fishing. This is not the kind of fishing Jesus had in mind for us when he called and commissioned us. We're just inviting fish from other aquariums to jump over into ours. This passage thus serves as a clarion call to every follower of Jesus and every local church, reminding us that fishing for people is to be our number one business. He wants all people to come to him for forgiveness and eternal life because he loves them deeply. And nothing pleases him more than when his followers intentionally fish for people to bring them in. Let us never, ever lose sight of that vision or settle for less. Heaven help us if we do.

Lately, long before I even wrote this message, I've been wrestling with some personal questions about my own fishing. And they're good, hard, fair questions needing to be asked of myself if I want to truly be a faithful follower of Jesus. That can be a little convicting as I ponder them. The first one is: when was the last time I talked about spiritual matters with a non-believer? The second one is: do I even have any nonbelievers in my sphere of influence? And if not, why not? Maybe it's time to go where the fish are. The third one is what obstacles are getting in the way of my going fishing. Is it a hectic life that's moving too fast so I don't have the time, or I just don't notice people around me? Am I easily distracted? Perhaps it's my own comfort zone. I'm fearful of failure and jeopardizing valuable relationships. Is it my lack of faith in the truth, that I'm not alone in this fishing venture and that God actually can work through me, no matter how weak and inadequate I may feel about it. If that's the case, forgive me, Lord. The fourth one is: am I praying daily for open doors to have spiritual conversations with people whose paths I cross? And do I pray daily that nonbelievers that I know would somehow come to know and follow Jesus and be saved? And the last one is: what have I done lately to keep me focused and sharpened my fishing skills as a fisherman for Jesus? Have I taken any training courses to inspire and equip me? What books have I read and pondered that might inspire and assist me to fish for people? By the way? Rebecca Manley Pippert's book entitled *Stay Salt*, or a book called *Organic Outreach* by... I'm forgetting his name now. It doesn't matter. [Kevin Harney.] These are very helpful for inspiration and skill building.

So there my questions. How would you answer these questions yourself? Listen, I'm not preaching at you. I'm talking to myself as well as a follower. You and I need to hear this again and again and again and act upon it if we are to truly be faithful, fruitful followers of Jesus. It's too easy to lose sight of this or choose to neglect that vision for us. So consider this message today a gentle, encouraging nudge of the spirit. Jesus wants us to fish. So. Let's get fishing. He's counting on us. Let's pray. Here I am. Lord, I heard your call, caught your vision. So use me. I am weak, but I am willing. Give me eyes to see and ears to hear those who are needing Jesus in their lives and give me courage and faith to gently speak your good news to them. Empower me and my words with your Holy Spirit. Amen.