

## **Come Follow Me 11-30-03**

Matthew 4:18-22

*18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 20 At once they left their nets and followed him. 21 Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, 22 and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Matthew 4:18-22 (NIV)*

The Sea of Galilee is called Lake Kennesaret today. Over the last 100 years, churches have bought up much of the shoreline so that the Northern shore of the lake remains as it did 2000 years ago. If I ever return to Israel, Mariko and I have a dream to spend a week just walking the triangle of Jesus' main ministry area, Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin. The lake is lower than it was in Jesus' day, but the water still laps the pebbled shoreline in a peaceful steady rhythm. You can eat the same type of fish the disciples caught, now called Peter's fish. Within sight is the Mount of Beatitudes, and nearby the 5000 were fed. In my humble opinion, it was the sovereign will of God that this area not be developed, but remain as it was in Jesus' day. If the Lord is willing and that dream comes to pass, I'd like to go a second time with a number of you to share that experience.

Unless we have read the Gospel of John, we would think this was Jesus' first encounter with these men. Actually, they already knew each other well. These men had been followers of John the Baptist, but at John's direction, they followed Jesus. They had even baptized people for Jesus. They'd seen Him clear out the outer court of the Temple. They'd seen the conversion of many Samaritans after Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well. Some of them had been at the wedding feast in Cana, where Jesus performed His first miracle. Some of them were sure He was the Messiah (John 1:42). But for some reason, they had returned to fishing. Perhaps they had run short of funds or had to meet family obligations. Perhaps Jesus' compassion for the Samaritans had caused them to have second thoughts, for Jews hated the Samaritans.

The Bible doesn't give us a definitive answer. Perhaps that is so that we can more readily relate to their experience. Many are attracted to Christ, but then come across something they are not comfortable with or find something that distracts them from continuing further. Is something distracting you today from going on with Christ? Have you set a limit on how far you will follow?

They had given up some of their time to follow Jesus, but they had not yet given up all to follow Him. Jesus had not yet asked them to leave everything else behind. Surely that time Jesus spent with them was a time of preparation for the day He

**Commented [notes1]:** 41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).

John 1:41 (NIV)

would call them. We can gain some more insight into what took place when we read Luke's account.

Luke 5:1-11 *1 One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, 2 he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. 4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." 6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.* (NIV)

A lot more went on than we saw in Matthew's abbreviated version. Jesus got in Peter's boat because He knew from their past time together that Peter was sympathetic to His ministry. There had been a time of preparation. Now it was time to call Peter to a new occupation. It was time to call Peter to leave all, but Peter needed some convincing. When Jesus asked Peter to go out and try casting his net again, Peter complained. He knew fishing. What does a carpenter know about fishing? This type of fish comes to the surface only at night. What Peter doesn't yet know is that this Second Adam has dominion over the fish of the sea. (Psalms 8:6-8) Can you just imagine the look on Peter's face when that boat began to lean under the weight of the fish? He filled his boat and his friend's boat so full that they were in danger of sinking. Then it hit Peter, the sudden realization that Jesus was giving him another chance to follow. But more than that, Jesus was not just a prophet. Who rules the fish of the sea? (Genesis 1:26) What power does He possess?

Realization or revelation of Christ is followed by conviction. Why had he left Jesus before? Why did he question Jesus' command to go back out on the lake? Jesus was another category of man, totally beyond the comprehension of Peter. In realization of the presence of holiness, Peter's own sinful condition became abhorrently real. Falling to his knees before Jesus he cried, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" He felt unworthy to even be in Jesus' presence.

Conviction is often followed by a call. Let us return to the Matthew text for Jesus' response. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." Allow me to paraphrase and expand on what Jesus was asking. "You came to me before, followed me for a time, but now I'm telling you it's time to leave everything else behind and follow me." Jesus was calling Peter to give up going his own direction and follow Him wherever that led. I Did It My Way is not a song of a

**Commented [notes2]:** 6 You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: 7 all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, 8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

Psalms 8:6-8 (NIV)

**Commented [notes3]:** 26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." Gen 1:26 (NIV)

disciple of Jesus. Following Jesus would lead to three years of training, to times of trial and testing, to fame and scorn, and to see his Master murdered on a cross. But it would also lead to new life, fullness of the Spirit, ministry, eternal reward, suffering for Jesus' name, and Peter's own death on a cross.

Later in Jesus' ministry He will say that if any man desires to follow Him, He must take up his cross daily and follow. "Come, follow me", is not for the faint of heart, or those who desire a predictable life of ease. It is following Him wherever He goes. It is the death sentence every day to our own will and ways. To take up a cross meant you were on your way to your execution. You simply followed the One leading until you arrived at the place of your death. Jesus would call others to follow, but they will say, "Lord, let me first..." They were not ready to follow.

Luke's gospel records Jesus saying, *"From now on, you will catch men."* "Your fishing for stinky fish days are over. Your life is about to go in a whole new direction. The catches from now on will be stinky men. You catch 'em and I'll clean 'em." They walked away from the biggest catch of fish in their lives. They left their livelihood behind to follow the man who could call the fish into a net, change water into wine, stand up to religious frauds, and was daring enough to love the rejected. What would you do?

Sometimes it helps to put ourselves in their shoes. There you are, doing your business day after day. Bills to pay, customers' demands, uncollected accounts, and suddenly, someone who you had heard about, maybe even have seen and been impressed with, walks up and fills your store with assets. If you had a rubber tomahawk shop you suddenly had a storeroom full. If you had a restaurant, your freezers were filled with rib eye. Then He asks you to walk away from it all and follow Him. What would you do? Peter didn't hesitate.

James and John were fixing their nets after all the breaks from this massive catch. Jesus called them, and they left their nets and their father with his hired servants. (Mark 1:20) What a life changing command, "Come, follow me!" I don't believe Jesus calls everyone away from their nets, but He does call us all to follow Him. Some of us are called to follow right where we work, right where are nets are. There is catch of men to be had right in our place of business among acquaintances.

**Commented [notes4]:** 20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. Mark 1:20 (NIV)

Charles Cowman was the youngest telegraph operator in Chicago and quickly rose in the company. When he surrendered to Jesus, Charles knew he had to tell the people he worked with. The first time he tried to do so, he was rejected. He would wait for a lull in the lines just so he could share with another person. Before long most of his fellow telegraph workers had come to Christ. They formed a Bible study group that supported a missionary. Charles was following Jesus.

One day the Lord asked Charles to leave his nets and go to Japan to follow Jesus. He continued to follow, and by faith, without any pledges of support, he took his family to Japan. He followed Jesus until, under his leadership, every house in Japan and many in Korea and China had received the Gospel message in their own

language. He had worn himself out following Jesus, and went to his heavenly reward.

There is a pattern in the life of the disciples and disciples since that time, disciples like Charles Cowman. There are years of preparation. Even Jesus was in preparation for 30 years before His ministry began. (Hebrews 5:8) The disciples spent 3 years in the school of Jesus. Charles Cowman grew up in a Christian home, followed the leading of the Holy Spirit for years of preparation before he was called to leave his nets. I think everything we experience is somehow an education for the things God has called us to do. Even what seems like senseless trials, God can use in our present and our future. We can be certain that it softens our hearts for those we meet who are enduring trials, but there is more.

**Commented [notes5]:** 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered Heb 5:7-8 (NIV)

Somewhere along the road of learning, we begin to see Christ for who He is, and in that light we see our real condition. Peter did, right there on the boat. Cowman did in an evangelistic meeting when his life in Christ first began. He clung to the pew in front of him, white knuckled, fighting the conviction. The walk home with his wife was the heaviest walk of his life. He felt the full weight of his sin. The moment he opened the door he dropped to his knees and cried out to God for mercy. Conviction is an essential step in our journey. It happens when, like Peter, we see Jesus for who He is. Like Isaiah, we are struck with His holiness and our uncleanness. Peter and Isaiah were already serving the Lord when conviction hit them and began a life transforming process.

It's after we see ourselves in the light of God that He can call us to follow. Until that happens, our service is diluted with self-serving and pride. It is the place where we are finally humbled enough to obey and not demand our own way. You'll never follow fully, unconditionally, unless you have yielded to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. "Come, follow me." The call comes when we don't think we are worthy. It comes when we are emptied of self, not full of ourselves. It comes when we are ready and willing to follow.

Matthew uses two expressions to describe the disciples' response, "at once" and "immediately". Once they knew it was God, there was no hesitation. Jesus knew who to call. They were men whose hearts had been prepared and then brought to conviction. They were hearts that were ready for change. Is yours? I have an idea that God rarely calls those who aren't willing to be called. He doesn't want to cause them more condemnation. It is privilege to be called.

This last week I considered what I was thankful for outside of the obvious like the love and grace of God and my family. For me, it is the call to serve God. What an honor! Is there any more important role among men than serving our Creator? It is more meaningful to me, because I know I don't deserve to opportunity to serve. Justice would have me banned from speaking about God, but grace made me His ambassador. How could I ever be grateful enough?

The disciples' response was definite and immediate. They dropped their old ways and began a whole new one. Now they are going to learn to catch men.

Here is the process: preparation, revelation, conviction, the call, and our response. But there is one more step; God's faithful work in us. He promised to make them fishers of men. He makes us; we don't make ourselves. After three years of training, sorrow unto death, and the great joy of restoration, Peter would cast a net in the city of Jerusalem and catch 3000 in one afternoon. We don't all have such monumental catches waiting for us, but you can be sure that God has a purpose for your life that will influence eternity, **if** you are willing to be transformed from believer to disciple.

Peter was a believer in Jesus before he heard the call. He was active in ministry. So was Isaiah. So was I. But an encounter with the holiness of God called them to discipleship. A disciple drops his own plans and desires and rights, and takes on those of his Lord. A believer is certainly bound for heaven, but a disciple is laying up treasure in heaven. A disciple is continually growing in grace and the knowledge of the Lord, for the very word disciple means learner.

Jesus once told his disciples that the only way to become a disciple was to let go of everything else. (Luke 14:33) That is not required to merely believe. For Peter it was his nets, for Isaiah it was his smug self-righteousness, for Charles Cowman it was security, and for me it was fear. Jesus challenged the rich young ruler to give up his wealth, because it was the one thing that stood in the way of going from believer to disciple. What stands in your way? Are you being called to discipleship?

This is the bridge we must cross to go on following the Lord. He left heaven behind and was willing to go to the cross, leaving even His communion with the Father behind for those three hours of darkness. "Follow me" means we are willing to go to the cross and die to self. We are willing to endure the darkness of testing and difficulty for the Kingdom of God.

Are you a disciple or a mere believer? What stage are you in, preparation, revelation, conviction, the call, or deciding whether or not to respond? Perhaps you are satisfied to remain merely a believer. God isn't. Do you think it was coincidence that Peter caught nothing all night? A fluke that Charles Cowman went to that revival meeting? Just part of life that Isaiah's friend died? God is working in our lives to take us to a deeper place in Him. He wants us to learn of Him, to have a revelation of His holiness and love. You can't rush the process, but you can have a willing heart to cooperate with His Spirit. He won't force the process on you when you are insistent on going your own way. Pray for God to begin moving you to a deeper walk through an increasing revelation of His holiness and love. He loves to hear that kind of a prayer from your heart. If you are willing and teachable, it won't be long before you hear Him say, "Come, follow me!" Perhaps He is speaking to you right now through His word. What should your response be?

**Commented [notes6]:** 33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:33 (NIV)