

Series: Called to Follow

“The Calling of a Disciple”

Matthew 4:12-22

Today, I am so excited as we begin a new sermon series here at Crosslink. At the start of every year, I typically preach a series of sermons focused on areas of need within our church body. These various emphases usually have to do with areas of Christian discipline and development where we need to grow as individuals and as a congregation. For example, over the last several years we have focused on living a lifestyle of generosity. We have studied how to grow in our prayer lives. We focused a few different years on being intentional in evangelism, and we looked closely at many examples in the Bible. One year we began by taking a deep dive into discovering our spiritual gifts and then using them to the glorify the Lord and build up the body of Christ. I believe that God has used these studies in different ways in the life of the church, and I certainly hope the same for us here today. Our pastoral team is praying specifically that this series will not simply set the pace for the year, but will set the pace for the rest of our lives and for the future of what God does in and through Crosslink Community Church. I am convinced that if Crosslink is to be the church that God has called her to be, and if you and I are to be the Christians that God wants us to be, there is no more important subject than the one at hand. In fact, even for the big “C” Church, this subject is one of the most crucial of our time. It is a great struggle within our congregation and in the hearts and lives of many people, and we are certainly not alone. All throughout the Church of America today we are seeing the results of negligence in this area, and those who wish to truly live for the Lord are wrestling with what it means and what it looks like in their ministry context. The topic is simply this – “Discipleship.” The word “disciple” seems so easy to understand. Perhaps we immediately envision the original disciples of Jesus that were called in the Bible. We remember how they spent time with Jesus, walking with Him and talking with Him along the way. Perhaps we look only at the impact of what God did through their lives after Jesus returned back to heaven. Regardless of the specific season of their lives, when most think of disciples, we think back to those few who were truly devoted to following Jesus. As we study this theme over the next few months, I want you to really wrestle with what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. What does this calling mean for us today, and more importantly what does it mean for you? Has Jesus called us all to be disciples, or was that only for the few who have already passed on? And if this calling is for us still today, then where do you stand? Are you truly a disciple of Jesus Christ? Perhaps you are sitting there thinking, “Well Pastor, I thought we were called to be Christians. I am a Christian. Doesn’t that also mean that I’m a disciple?” Sadly, the answer isn’t so easy. The term “Christian” in our culture has significantly lost its meaning. Many years ago, being a Christian meant that one had repented of their sins and had trusted in Jesus as their Savior and, as such, were living for Him. Today, the term has been watered down greatly. There are many today who identify as “Christian” because they go to religious meetings regularly. There are many who identify as “Christian” because they try to love people and serve their fellow man. Many identify as “Christian” because their grandmother was a saint and their granddaddy told them Bible stories. Others identify as “Christian” because they grew up in a Bible-based culture and they know some of the Christian principles and values. Many identify as “Christians” because their political conservative values tend to be similar to biblical values. These can be identified because they are more readily identified by their political party than they are with the life of the One who supposedly saved them. Even in all the chaos of our culture, we still live in a nation that largely identifies itself as

“Christian,” yet so much of our nation does not represent Christ at all. In 1990 over 90% of America identified as Christian, and still today (depending upon the poll) somewhere between 60-70% still identify as “Christian.” So, we live in a country where many profess to be Christian and yet so little of our country actually looks anything like the values of Christ. We call ourselves Christians, yet we’ve aborted over 40 million babies since 1980. We call ourselves Christian, yet we can’t even clearly define what a male or a female is. We call ourselves Christians, and yet we look at God’s plan for marriage and redefine it based upon our own personal preferences and cultural pressures. We call ourselves Christians, but we pervert what God set apart as holy and good, while celebrating what God calls perverse. We call ourselves Christian, while denying the authority of God’s Word and dismissing it where we disagree. We can call ourselves whatever we want, but if there is no evidence of Christ in our life then our claims are worthless. God shows us clearly in His Word that being a Christian is not about religious works, moral upbringings, conservative values or leanings, or even memorized Bible knowledge. Being a Christian is about a personal relationship with Jesus through faith that leads us to be a fully devoted follower of Him. In the Gospel accounts, this is really what discipleship is all about.

It is interesting to note that in the Bible Jesus never once called someone to be a “Christian.” The term was not used until **Acts 11:26** in Antioch where those who had believed in Jesus began to act like Him, talk like Him, and demonstrate evidence of a life that had been changed by Him. Because they turned from their sins, trusted in Jesus, and began to demonstrate a life that had been transformed by Jesus, the people around them called them “Christians.” In other words, they were associated with Jesus Christ because their life had been changed by Him. Did you know, though, that the term “Christian” is only used three times in the entire Bible? It is first used in Acts 11 and then again in **Acts 26:28** where Paul preached the Gospel to King Agrippa and called him to believe in Jesus and repent of his sin. He said, “Paul, almost you persuaded me to be a Christian.” It is interesting to note that Agrippa understood his need to trust in Jesus and repent of his sins to be associated with Christ as a Christian, but he was unwilling to do so. The final time the term is used is in **1 Peter 4:16** when it describes those who suffer and are persecuted as a Christian. In other words, once again they are marked as being like Christ even in their sufferings. I find it interesting that in each case the title “Christian” is never used by someone to describe themselves, but it is used by others to refer to the evidence of Christ that was observed in another’s life. I also find it interesting that while the term “Christian” is only used those three times in the Bible the term “disciple” is used just over 270x’s. Please understand that I am not suggesting that we do away with the name “Christian.” I am simply calling us to consider whether our claim of Christianity is true. Does our life reflect the change that Jesus brings? Do others clearly see Jesus in us? I suggest to us today that if we understand and pursue our calling to be disciples, fully devoted followers of Jesus, then the change that He brings will be evident and our lives will more accurately reflect Him to a world that greatly needs Him, and this will bring glory to the Lord.

It is appropriate that we begin our study by looking to Matthew 4, where Jesus first called His first disciples. As we study today and throughout the coming weeks, I want to ask you directly, “Are you all in? Are you a fully devoted follower of Christ?”

Show Text

Matthew 4 records the beginning of Jesus' ministry. After His baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness as He was being tested and tempted. Upon defeating the enemy's attempts, He officially began His public ministry and everywhere He went He preached the message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." It is important to note that, according to **John 1:40-42**, Simon Peter had already become a believer in Jesus. Simon Peter's younger brother Andrew had heard Jesus speak, believed in Him, and ran to share the good news with his brother. We do not know all that transpired after that encounter with Jesus, but it is clear from Matthew 4 that the brothers were already aware of who Jesus was and had already trusted, to some extent, in Him. Surely there were many things that they did not yet know. There was much more to learn and discover in the coming days, but it was here in this moment that Jesus now called them to be a disciple. As we study the passage, I want us to make four observations about Jesus' calling of a disciple.

I. It Is a Relational Call – "Follow Me"

As we read the Scripture, it seems like this is just a random moment. As Jesus is walking by the Sea of Galilee, all of a sudden He sees these two brothers. But a further investigation into the text indicates that this was actually a very intentional step of Jesus. It was intentional in part because Jesus was fulfilling the long-promised prophecy about the Messiah. Some of you may remember back to Isaiah 9. This prophecy, written 700 years before the birth of Jesus, described the birth of a child, a Son, who would be Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. This prophecy begins, however, by talking about a specific region and a specific purpose. **Isaiah 9:1-2** says, "But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them." Now, fast forward 700 years as Jesus went to Galilee. It would be here that He would basically set up His home base. This would be the region where the vast majority of His miracles and teachings would occur. It would be from this little spot that Jesus would literally change the world, and **verses 15-16** of our text remind us specifically that this was to fulfill the prophecy.

As Jesus is beginning His public ministry, He knows that it is time to call some to follow Him. The idea of having a disciple was not new. It was common in that culture for philosophers and leaders to have students who studied them, listened to their teachings, and followed their ways. They were often referred to as disciples. In fact, prior to this moment, Simon's brother Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist. As Jesus is now walking by the Sea of Galilee, He is not only fulfilling the prophecy of old, but He is taking personal responsibility to initiate a deeper relationship with the two brothers. They could have and would have been content to stay there and fish the rest of the day and likely their whole lives, but God had a greater plan and purpose for them. So, Jesus takes the first step by going to them and calling them to Himself. As we think of this relational call, I want you to consider four aspects of it.

First, consider the Person who was calling them. This is Jesus, the Savior of the world, the second person of the Trinity, God the Son. He knew exactly who these men were and was fully aware of their trade. He knew that they were hard-working fishermen, and He knew day in and day out where their favorite fishing spots were. He also knew that they had a unique role to play in God's

plan of salvation. Having spent time in the wilderness for prayer, Jesus was fully aware of what the Father was leading Him to do. Jesus said in **John 5:19b**, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing.” With that reality we can be confident that Jesus has prayed about this and is fully aware of what God is leading Him to do. So here is Jesus, the Son of God and the Savior of the world, coming to Peter and Andrew while in the midst of their work. He could have walked on water, parted the sea, or caused a wind to bring them immediately to the shore, but He simply walked by the sea and as they fished in the shallow waters He called them to follow.

Consider the personal nature of this call. In this moment Jesus was not calling everyone. He was specifically calling Peter and Andrew out from among the crowd. Interestingly, Matthew emphasizes that Simon “was called Peter.” This is significant because we often think of him as Simon Peter, but his simple name was Simon. At the moment he began to follow Jesus, in **John 1:42b**, “Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas (which is translated Peter).’ ” At first glance, the name “Cephas” sounds strange to us, but it was a Syriac name which simply means “rock.” It is a powerful reminder to us that when Jesus called him to follow, He did not simply see him as Simon but for what he would be. Jesus knew every aspect of Simon’s life - the good, the bad, and the ugly. Yet, He also knew through the investment He would make in Peter, through the power of the resurrection and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, how Peter would be changed. Think of it for a moment: If you were to start a major movement to change the world, who might you choose? Would you look for the people of position and influence that easily direct a crowd? Would you look for the wealthy who could fund your movement? Would you look for educated and skilled orators to dramatically relay the message? I doubt any of us would think, “Hey, you see those boys over their catching fish? That’s who I’m going after.” None of us would call fishermen, but Jesus saw them not merely as they were but for who they would be through His work in their lives. What a wonderful, joyous opportunity that Jesus is offering to these brothers as He calls them out from the crowd to follow Him.

Consider their place in the calling. Jesus was not calling them to be the master or boss but to follow the One who is. He didn’t show up to say, “Hey guys, go ahead and live your life however you want and do whatever you want to do.” He was calling them to recognize that He is the Lord and Master and as such, He was inviting them to follow Him. The call to be a disciple is always this way. Author **Jim Putman** said it this way, “The call of a true disciple is a call to a change in allegiance, from self to Jesus’ leadership in our lives.” Jesus is calling them to recognize that He is the Lord and leader, and this is more than simply a position to be understood in the mind, but something that was to be seen in their practice. Following Him means that He was calling them to submit to Him, learn from Him, and follow Him. This is why so many are hindered from following Jesus. To truly follow Him means that it is no longer “me first, but He first.” It’s not about my wants and my will but about His. Why? Because He is Lord and ruler. Jesus said it this way in **John 12:26**, “If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.” To truly be a follower of Christ means that I am following Jesus, not the will of others, not my own wants, and not the ways of the world. The calling of a disciple is first a relational call. We are called by a person – Jesus Christ.

II. It Is a Transformational Call – “And I Will Make You”

This simple statement is a promise of what will occur as they fulfill the first statement. As they follow Jesus, He will make them something that they weren't already and could never be on their own. The picture is one of transformation and change. The word in Greek literally means "to create, to produce." This should not surprise us at all. God is in the soul-saving, chain-breaking, life-changing business. Paul testifies of this in **2 Corinthians 5:17** when he describes the change that God brings to an individual when they trust in Jesus for salvation, saying, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." When we believe in Jesus, He changes us and we are made a new creation in Christ. There's also a change that will take place in our bodies when these physical bodies are gone and we are given a heavenly body. **1 Corinthians 15:51-52** says, "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." We cannot read God's Word without being reminded of the many changes He brings to our lives. Yes, He brings changes to us at salvation and makes us a new person in Christ. Yes, He will bring a change to our body in the future when we are united with Him in heaven. But, between the first change and the final change, there is a change that is happening within us every day as we submit to and follow Him. As we follow Jesus day in and day out, the Holy Spirit works within us to transform us into the image of Christ.

It is important to note that Jesus says, "I will make you." The transformation that God desires to do in our life is impossible apart from Christ. ****ILL:** We all love a good transformation story. People watch all kinds of home renovation shows to see how people take the old dilapidated, fixer-upper and transform it to be the nicest house on the block. There's no shortage of creativity and skills that people can use to change objects like a house. Even more impressive is when a coach takes a mediocre group of players with all kinds of different personalities, strengths, and weaknesses and gets them to function as one unit and suddenly they are transformed to be a championship-caliber team. Transformation stories capture our attention and give us a measure of hope and excitement, but the kind of transformation needed within a man is impossible apart from Christ. When Jesus says, "I will make you," He is describing the fact that it would be through this ongoing relationship that He would transform them. It would be as they walk with Him, talk with Him, listen to Him, watch Him, obey Him, and be equipped by Him that they would be transformed. In other words, this transformation was going to be an ongoing process. This fact encourages me because I realize that they didn't always get it right. There were times when the disciples would argue among themselves, and Jesus would have to rebuke them. There were times that He would give them a direct task, but due to their lack of faith, they would fall short. There were times that He would teach them, and they just didn't fully get it. There was even a time with this same Simon Peter that he would be so caught up in fear and pressure that he would deny Jesus. It would not always be perfect or easy, but Jesus was inviting them to a deeper relationship with the promise that He would radically transform them into something they could never be or do on their own.

Friend, as we submit to Jesus and follow Him as Lord, He is faithful to work in us to transform us. We will not be transformed when we remain distant, but as we walk with Him daily, step by step, He produces His life in us. We will not always get it right, and we will stumble and struggle at times along the way, but **Philippians 1:6** says, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." I love the promise of **2**

Corinthians 3:18 which says, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” As we walk by faith and follow Him day by day, He is transforming us into the very image of Christ. This was the assurance of Jesus as He said, “Follow Me, and I will make you...”

III. It Is a Purposeful Call – “Fishers of Men”

We are immediately reminded with this third phrase that Jesus knew exactly what He was doing. Even back in John 1 when He called Peter a rock and now to this occasion, there was a strategic purpose for inviting them to follow Him. Jesus was not aiming at something blindly. Yes, they would be transformed, but their personal transformation was not the end goal. The purpose for this call was to make them something new and equip them to be fishers of men. To be clear, there was nothing wrong with their current occupation. This is what they were skilled and trained to do and how they provided for their family. Though there was nothing wrong with what they were doing, the Lord had a greater purpose for their lives than they could see in the moment. The phrase “fishers of men” wasn’t unheard of, but I’m sure it felt a bit misplaced to Peter and Andrew. The title was often used by Greek and Roman philosophers to describe the work of those who seek to “catch” others through teaching and persuasion, but this is not what Peter and Andrew were accustomed to. They were used to fishing for fish. They were accustomed to evaluating the waters, assessing the movement of the fish, mending the nets, gathering the fish, cleaning them and preparing them, etc. They were hard workers who were always busy about their trade. How could they be fishers of men? After all, they weren’t great speakers. They weren’t skilled in speech, customs, education, or noted for their influence. They held no positions of notoriety in the court or even in the town square. From our perspective it seems like an odd choice, but Jesus deliberately and directly called these hard-working common men to follow Him and assured them that He would make them something new - fishers of men. At a second glance it makes sense that Jesus would call them. They weren’t afraid of or unwilling to work, which should also be true of followers of Jesus. They were courageous, willing to fulfill their responsibility even in the midst of storms and dangers, which should also be true of followers of Jesus. They had to be patient to reap the benefits of their labors, which should also be true of followers of Jesus. There are host of attributes that would have been true of them. These are skills that they naturally possessed or had developed over time, but once they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit, there was no limit to what God could do through them. In the moment, these guys did not yet fully understand all that the future would hold and all that God had in store for them, but I believe they did understand that Jesus was calling them to put their time, effort, and energy into reaching men and not merely catching fish.

Clearly, there was no forewarning of the invitation that Jesus was going to give. Perhaps when Jesus told Simon that he would be called “Cephas” Simon began to think deeply about the name and what it meant for his life. Perhaps he’d been praying and asking for direction. Jesus’ action was intentional; what could it mean? The same is true in our lives. When we have been saved, we have experienced this gift for a reason. Paul told Timothy in **2 Timothy 1:9**, “(God) Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” God had a purpose in bringing salvation to Peter and He does the same for us today. We don’t know all that was going on in Peter’s heart and mind, but we do know that Jesus was calling him and Andrew to a closer and deeper relationship that required faith and surrender. It required faith to trust that Jesus was in fact the Savior and worthy of following. It required faith to trust that Jesus was worth leaving their

nets behind to follow Him. It required faith that Jesus could actually fulfill the promise stated through His invitation.

It also required surrender. They clearly heard the invitation, and they were brought to a moment of decision. They could let go of their plans and follow Jesus further, or they could resist His invitation and pursue their own plans and dreams. They could not stay where they were and go with Jesus at the same time. **Hebrews 11:6** reminds us that, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” That verse had not yet been penned, but Simon Peter and Andrew certainly demonstrated faith. The Scripture says plainly, “Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.” There was no delay, debate, dismissal, deterrence, or distraction. They simply heeded the invitation of Jesus and left to follow Him. They didn’t know exactly where they were going, all that they would do, how long the process would take, or every detail of what it meant. They simply knew the Savior was calling them and without batting an eye they said, “Yes.”

IV. It Is a Communal Call – “And He Called Them”

It may sound strange to hear of discipleship being “communal.” How is this possible when we consider that the call to follow Jesus is a personal invitation that demands a personal response? I believe we see the answer to this in the following verses. Because of the role that Peter would play among the disciples, we tend to focus primarily on his calling, but it is clear that he was not called alone. Immediately after calling Peter and Andrew, Jesus went on and found the other two brothers, James and John. These two sets of brothers had a close connection and affiliation with each other. Jesus was not content to only call Peter and Andrew, but He was very deliberate to also call James and John. The Scripture implies that He gave them the same calling, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” We then see a very similar response, “Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.”

There are many aspects of this that we will discover throughout our study in the coming weeks, but for now I am simply saying that the call to follow Jesus as disciples is a communal call. The word literally means “of or relating to a community.” This simple illustration from Scripture is a vivid reminder that we cannot be a disciple of Jesus without a community through which to follow Him. Jesus’ call is always personal and demands a personal response, but it is always in connection with Him and with others. We see a great illustration of that when Jesus saw Matthew the tax collector and said, “Follow Me.” It was an individual, personal call, but immediately upon following Jesus, Matthew was adopted into the community. This is something that we must not ignore or take lightly in our lives today. Never in my 20 years of ministry or in anything I have ever read about the history of the Church have we seen so many “lone ranger” Christians. These are individuals who have trusted in Jesus and turned from their sin, but due to ignorance, negligence, hurts, distractions, messed up priorities, and a host of other influences, they are not connected in community with others who are following Jesus. Is it any surprise then that the vast majority of the Church really looks no different than the world around us? We will never be the disciples of Christ that we are meant to be without intentionally engaging with others who are also following Jesus, and we will never fulfill our calling as disciples if we are not intentionally investing in and making disciples of others. My point is simply that you will not be a devoted follower of Christ or effectively help others do the same without intentional engagement in community.

It is here that we need to pause and consider, “What is keeping us from engaging in community with other followers of Christ? What has become so important in our life that it’s more important than following Jesus? What are we investing in that is more important than my own spiritual growth or the spiritual growth of others? Satan has done a masterful job of bringing division, hurt, separation, busyness, and idols into our lives that hinder us from following Jesus together. As we give in to his influence, we become weaker by the moment, more vulnerable to his attacks, and before long there is very little resemblance of Christ in our life and our influence for Him is deeply minimized. Brothers and sisters in Christ, I urge you to fight the drift to complacency and isolation. I urge you to look to Jesus and devote yourself to following Him and to recognize that He calls us to follow Him together. I believe that this journey over the next several months can be life-changing and can be culture-shifting for us as a church, if we are willing to answer His call. Jesus is calling, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” I don’t know all that He will do, how He will move, and where it will take us, but I trust Him.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor martyred for his faith for standing up against Hitler and his atrocities in World War II. Before his imprisonment and eventual death, he wrote a book for Christians which has become a classic called *The Cost of Discipleship*. I close the message with his quote on Jesus’ call to follow: “If we answer the call to discipleship, where will it lead us? What decisions and partings will it demand? To answer this question we shall have to go to Him, for only He knows the answer. Only Jesus Christ who bids us follow Him, knows the journey’s end. But we do know that it will be a road of boundless mercy. Discipleship means joy.”