

Jason Upchurch - Mark 1:16-20 - The Good News of Discipleship

This little passage here seems rather unassuming, maybe even a throw away passage but I think it is an amazing little passage.

We're introduced to the first 4 of the 12 disciples, also known as apostles. How they first met Jesus and a brief description of what was going on in their lives. We'll meet all 12 of these men in chapter 3. But here, there's just the first 4. And it was likely just these 4 guys for a while in Jesus' early ministry.

We often say that the 12 apostles followed Jesus for 3 years but the reality is that not all of them followed Jesus that long. For most it was considerably less than that.

Let me give you a little anecdote to set up our passage because I think it will help you see what Jesus is doing here.

Imagine you were going to run for governor or senate or president. You would want to surround yourself with the absolute best people around you. You'd want a reputable guy for your treasury. Lots of experience, PhD in economics, Executive VP at Barclays or Chase Bank, Undersecretary of the Treasury. You'd want this person to have a resume that was a mile long.

You'd want something like that for Secretary of State: lots of international political experience, CIA background. And expert at Middle Eastern negotiations, speaks Chinese fluently. Your Secretary of Transportation had been part of the DOT at the upper levels, Bachelors in Civil engineering, so on.

The higher the office, the more sophisticated the political apparatus you would develop. You'd want the Dream Team of political operatives so that when you took power you were a well oiled machine on day 1. If you're smart, that's how you establish a political dynamo with the cream of the crop.

Now, remember, Jesus has just been baptized, he's been tempted, and he bursts on the scene preaching. And he's not looking to take King Herod's spot in Judea or to be the Tetrarch of the Decapolis. He's not even looking to overthrow Caesar. He's preaching a Kingdom infinitely bigger than that. A supernatural Kingdom that will bring down all other Kingdoms according to **Daniel 2**. This is the Kingdom of God. It's the amazing news that if you repent from your sins and believe in Jesus God will make you a son and you will reign with him forever.

So Jesus bursts on the scene: the Kingdom is at hand! Jesus is King and his first act of preaching the gospel is to establish his ambassadors - his cabinet - and who does he pick to usher in the greatness of the Kingdom of God?

Four fishermen whose only qualifications in life are to throw nets into the water and drag up fish and to sew those nets when they break. These guys can drag tilapia into a wooden boat, that's what they know.

This is Jesus's inner circle. This is his cabinet, his executive team to usher in the greatest Kingdom the world will ever know. Four sweaty fisherman.

Simon, we find out a little later has a wife. He's married. But the rest of the others are probably very young. Maybe teenagers or early twenties and all are under their father's authority.

There is a lot of irony in the way Mark depicts Jesus's ministry and this is one of the biggest ones. These guys are going to have their names on the foundations of the Kingdom. And this is actually a big encouragement to us this morning.

And this is the big takeaway for this morning: Jesus uses very normal people to build his very supernatural Kingdom.

Most of us here this morning are very normal people. No offense, but most all of us are not exceptional. We are not amazing. That is by design.

1 Cor. 1:26–29 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

This is that principle in action at the very beginning of Jesus's ministry. Jesus uses very normal people to build his supernatural Kingdom. That's the big picture.

Let's take a look more closely.

1) Jesus's Kingdom uses people from all avenues of life. **Read 16**

All 4 of these men were fishermen. In ancient Galilee, fishing was a common way of life for those who lived along the Sea of Galilee. Fishing boats varied in size, but were often 20-30 feet long and 7-8 ft wide.

In 1986 in Israel an ancient boat was found called the Galilee boat. It was discovered during a massive drought when the water was very low and it is dated to approximately the time of Jesus. It's believed to be a fishing boat that was used at the time. The boat is 27ft long - that's from the back to the front of the sanctuary and almost 8 feet wide: the width from the window to the column.

These were very common boats in Jesus's day. You can see why Jesus and the 12 disciples would often sail across the sea in these vessels - they could easily hold 13 men.

The fishermen usually used a circular net with weights all around the net. They would throw the net out, the weights would pull the net to the bottom of the lake - which is only around 80ft deep on average - and trap the fish to the bottom. The fishermen would then pull up the net trapping the fish in the net on the way back up. These nets were not the huge commercial fishing nets we think of that are pulled up by a crane and winch system. These were smaller nets.

If you remember in **John 21** Peter catches a very large catch of fish after the resurrection of Jesus. Do you remember how many fish were in the net? 153. John says it was a massive catch, it surprised John that the net didn't break.

These probably would have been tilapia maybe 12in to 18in in length - not very big. The fisherman would then sell the fish to make a living. In their off time, as Mark notes, they would mend the nets. There's no hardware store to go buy more nets or rope, you made everything you used.

These 4 young men are the foundation of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is the cornerstone, and **Ephesians 2** says we are fellow citizens of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles - average fishermen.

And he uses all kinds of others to build his Kingdom. And he uses people who are very average, very normal. They come from all walks of life. Mostly unsophisticated, and mostly uneducated in religious matters.

It's interesting that none of the original apostles were Pharisees or Sadducees. Paul was, but he was later. Some of those came to faith later. Nicodemus and others did follow Jesus, but Jesus didn't appoint any of those group as his initial 12 apostles. God has decided in his wisdom to build his kingdom mostly with average people.

Think about our congregation. We have educators and electricians. Stay at home moms and those who work in the food industry. We have people in technology and trades, painters, retired folks, public servants. And through average people God is building his Kingdom.

Go a step further and God often uses very disreputable people to build his Kingdom. Jesus says prostitutes go into the Kingdom before the Pharisees. Are you okay with God establishing his Kingdom with prostitutes? Tax collectors? Because he is.

And the glory of that is that, by God's grace, we all get to take part in the Kingdom. There are no small roles. There are no unimportant parts. If you're part of the Kingdom your role is valuable.

2) God calls normal people into the Kingdom to **build** the Kingdom. **Read 17**

We've probably heard this play on concepts many times. And I think it's beautiful because Jesus is taking all that these average fishermen know and he's turning it into a paradigm for their ministry.

Stay with me here: The goal of fisherman is to catch fish. The goal of a follower of Christ, is to catch men. What does that mean? It means to make disciples.

That's what he's really calling them to do: to build the Kingdom. That's their mission as followers of Jesus.

See, a lot of times when we think about the gospel we are very individualistic. God has saved **me** from hell, he's saved **me** from his own divine and just wrath. And that's true. We can celebrate that Christ died for me and gave himself up for me (**Gal. 2**). But the problem is we often go on our merry way thinking we're good. And maybe we feel conviction to tell people about the gospel once in a while.

But when Jesus calls someone into the Kingdom they themselves become Kingdom builders. When you become a disciple of Jesus by faith in Jesus you in turn go make disciples of Jesus. No matter where you are in life.

Do you teach people? You're teaching them the way of Jesus now.

Are you a mechanic? You're doing a complete restoration with the gospel.

Do you program for a living? You're reprogramming people for Jesus. Okay that one sounds a little creepy.

Do you fill people with coffee? You're filling them with truth now.

You get the idea. The Kingdom is all hands on deck for advancing the Kingdom. As soon as you're caught up in the gracious net of God's saving grace you're handed a net to go toss out into the sea.

Side note: this doesn't mean you need to go out passing out tracts on the street corner or go become a missionary in the Congo or start street preaching. When I was in high school and people talked about evangelism I always thought I had to go do some door to door ministry and I just wanted to die.

No, really becoming fishers of men is as simple as just telling people what Jesus has done for you. The earliest Christians were called martus - witnesses. You know what a witness does? They just tell people what they've seen and experienced. How did Jesus change you? That's all.

You don't have to have all the answers, you don't have to know every inch of your Bible. **Look at Mark 5:19.** Remember this is the demon possessed man with the Legion of demons in him? Jesus casts the demons into the pigs and the guy is sitting in his right mind. **Read 18-20**

Ten minutes ago he's possessed with thousands of demons. Now he's a martus - a witness. Jesus didn't say read the whole Bible first. He didn't say go to Bible college read a bunch of systematic theology. Those are all good things, of course.

But just go tell people what the Lord has done for you. Go tell your friends. Go tell people you know, people in your orbit. What do you tell them? What God has done for you. Specifically how he has had mercy on you. Who you were before Jesus and how Jesus showed you mercy and changed you.

"Hey we've known each other for 10 years and I just want to let you know this amazing thing has happened to me: I've become a Christian. I was always a little skeptical of Christianity, but I started to learn a little more. I

heard the gospel: that I'm a sinner bound for hell, but that God in his love has saved me through faith alone in Jesus. And my life has changed. I'm not perfect, but I want to love Jesus. What do you believe about Jesus?"

Or maybe you've known people for a while but never addressed it. You could just say "Hey we've known each other for a while, I think you know I'm a Christian. Just curious: what do you believe about Jesus and the Bible?" And then let them tell you. And listen patiently. And then say, "Would you mind if I told you what I believe?" In my experience, if you patiently listen to people and engage them in a respectful way, they'll give you an opportunity to tell your story.

That's pretty simple. It's not always easy; there's often some nervousness. But it doesn't have to be a long elaborate spiel. But I think this is the easiest advice about evangelism we could ever take. **Read 19**

John Piper once preached a dynamite sermon in the late 90s. It's basically what his book *Don't Waste Your Life* is based on. If you've never read that little book or listened to the sermon, you really should.

Here's how Piper opens that sermon: "You don't have to know a lot of things for your life to make a lasting difference in the world. But you do have to know the few great things that matter, and then be willing to live for them and die for them. The people that make a durable difference in the world are not the people who have mastered many things, but who have been mastered by a few great things.

"If you want your life to count, if you want the ripple effect of the pebbles you drop to become waves that reach the ends of the earth and roll on for centuries and into eternity, you don't have to have a high IQ or a high EQ. You don't have to have good looks or riches. You don't have to come from a fine family or a fine school. You just have to know a few great, majestic, unchanging, obvious, simple, glorious things, and be set on fire by them."

That's true. And being mastered by those few small truths. Of the gospel is how the Kingdom grows.

And notice that back in **Mark 1** Jesus says he will do this. **Read 17**

Jesus called them into the Kingdom and Jesus will make them fishers of men. It is a certainty. They will go out and have the exact success that Jesus wants them to have. Jesus will use our witness and the power of the gospel to draw people to himself. It might be one person, it might be hundreds, it might be no one that we see in our lifetime.

But Jesus will do it.

3) The 3rd thing I want us to see here is that the call into the Kingdom is total. The Lord Jesus demands total allegiance to him. Notice the response to Jesus calling these 4 men. **Read 16-20**

Now, this is all Mark gives us to go on here. We're not given any information as to whether or not these guys had talked to Jesus before or seen Jesus. I think they had. But that's not the point. The stark point that Mark is making is that when Jesus called these guys, they immediately followed. That's the emphasis of **Vs. 18. Read**

There was no hesitation, there was no second thought. The God man is calling them to follow him and they go. This is the reaction of both sets of brothers. Simon and Andrew, James and John.

The immediacy of James and John is almost so fast it's comical. **Read 20**

They don't even finishing the fishing trip. Bye, Dad - the servants will help you catch fish from now on. This is radical. They're leaving their father's fishing business to follow Jesus. Not only is this an immediate reaction, it's a total life commitment.

But this is what Jesus calls us to. The call into the Kingdom of God is not a partial call. It's not like a part time job or a side hustle. Jesus is looking for total devotion to him in every area of life.

Look over at **Luke 9:57-62**. This is a short interchange between Jesus and 3 people. And the point is to show the total nature of what Jesus is calling people to. **Read**

So the first guy he says that following him will mean essentially a nomadic life. The second guy he commands to follow him just like he commanded the apostles. And the guy gives what we would probably consider a legitimate reason to wait just a little. Let me go bury my dad. Jesus rejects that in a radical way. No, it's now or never.

The guy likely giving a bigger excuse than we see on the surface. The ESV Study Bible indicates that burial in Jewish times could be longer than a year. You would place someone in a cave while their body decayed. And then later you would take their bones and put them in a bone box to be officially buried. So he was likely saying let me wait a year or so before I come with you.

No - it's now. **And** Jesus is more important than our family anyway. He's reorienting the priorities of all his followers.

The final guy makes it clear that immediacy is the issue. Let me go say good bye. No. God is calling you now. And his little parable is instructive. **Read 62**

If you're driving your animal team and you're standing on the plow and you look back, you'll swerve one way or another. It's like riding a bicycle and looking back too long you start drifting off the road.

Jesus says if you start following him and look back at your old life in fondness and regret you'll swerve. And you're not fit for the Kingdom.

You guys - that's pretty stark language. There's no way to soften that up. We don't look back.

Luke 14:26: If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life he cannot be my disciple.

Are we actually called to hate people? No. Are we called to reevaluate absolutely everything in our lives including our closest family relationship in light of Jesus? Yes. The call to follow Jesus is absolute.

I've known people who talk about their life before Jesus like they miss it. The girlfriends they had or the jobs they had, the parties they went to or the money they made under the table, the lifestyle. It's almost as though they know following Jesus is a good thing, it's just not an amazing thing.

Almost like being on a new diet: you know you need to make some changes but you really miss the old way of life. The cake and high cholesterol food will kill you so we don't eat it, but man I really miss it.

No. To follow Jesus and turn to the greatest Kingdom the world will ever know. And the greatest King that will ever be who gives greater rewards than this life can ever imagine in a way that we can describe and for a duration that will know no end.

And so we never look back. Our old life wasn't cake and sweets and bowls of candy. It was cyanide and hemlock and arsenic. It was poison. All those things we loved and were committed to were killing us. They led to death and shame and more and more sin.

And yet God in his mercy and grace comes out of nowhere and says: follow me.

When Jesus comes and offers the Kingdom and says follow me, number 1 he's not asking, he's commanding. And number 2, he's offering the eternal jackpot. Treasures we can't imagine. Glory we can't fathom. Joy inexpressible.

If you're not part of that Kingdom, Jesus is commanding you to follow.

For the rest of us: Jesus calls average people into his glorious Kingdom from all walks of life. People like you and me.

Go fish for men that they might experience the same grace.

Pray