

Fishing for People

From the Series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe"

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By Phil Brainerd

Introduction

When I was young, I remember seeing a sign in a storefront window. It had two words: "Gone fishing". Things were very laid back in those days. If a business owner thought he wasn't seeing enough customers, he could just close his shop and head out to the local lake for the afternoon to enjoy a classic American pastime.

Fishing has always been popular. In the late 1800's, Author Mark Twain wrote about characters like Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer. These young boys were often pictured sitting by a quiet creek fishing. In those days, all you needed was a sturdy stick, some string, a can of worms, and you were good to go for the day.



From another viewpoint, fishing has always been an industry. We're all seen pictures of fishing boats on the ocean.

Fishing can be hard work. Fishermen often go out late at night or early morning before sunrise. And if a storm blows in, the job of a fisherman can get dangerous.

Fishing is an activity that has spanned all ages of mankind. From the first time that humans discovered that they could eat fish, people have been fishing in one form or another. Today, we're going to see something unique. Here it is: We're going to learn that it's possible to go fishing for things other than fish.

Let's read:

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 send you out to fish for people." 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)

Over the last few sessions, we've seen that Jesus prepared a long time for his public ministry. He spent 30 years in obscurity, growing up in a little-known town called Nazareth. After meeting with John the Baptist, Jesus was led into the mountain wilderness near the dead sea to

be tempted by the Devil. Then, he moved to the northern region of Israel called Galilee and positioned himself in a large population center on the northwest edge of the sea of Galilee.

All of this was to prepare Jesus for his mission. He's now ready to begin to begin that mission. At the close of our last session, we learned the first thing that Jesus did.

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Mathew 4:17)

The first thing Jesus did to begin his mission was preach. He proclaimed a message. We learn something from this: **For Jesus, one of the most important parts of his mission was a message.** Think mission and message. At this point, the message is this: The kingdom has come near, and there's something people need to do to enter the kingdom. They need to repent. As we study the life of Jesus in Matthew's book, we'll learn that this message will expand.

- Jesus will tell people more about the kingdom.
- He'll tell them about his place in it.
- And he'll tell them about their place in it.

For Jesus, the start of his mission was a message. That was the first thing Jesus did in his public ministry.

Here's a really important question: What's the **second** thing Jesus did? Here it is: We just read in the opening passage that Jesus commanded a small group of men to follow him. He gives this command to two pairs of brothers: Peter and Andrew, James and John. Three of these four men will form the core of a group later known as "The Twelve Apostles".

Here we see another important point: **Jesus always intended for his mission to be carried on by others.** At the close of Matthew's book, Jesus tells his followers to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). Add to that: At the beginning of the book of Acts, Luke tells us that Jesus then ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9).

Jesus could have stayed around forever and preached the message himself. He didn't do that. Instead, he chose twelve men and taught them how to carry on his mission. Those twelve men taught others. Over centuries, the others taught more. Two thousand years later, the message has come to us. **It is now our mission to share that message - To share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

In our session today, we're going to concentrate on two questions:

First, what is the message?

- What is the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Second, what does it take to be part of this great mission?

- We'll see that when we look at these four men

Let's go.

I. What is the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

The Apostle Paul gives us the most concise statement of the Gospel in I Corinthians 15. To many of our readers today, this is familiar. If that's the case, I'm going to ask you to hang in. This part will be relatively short. Then we'll move on to part two; the second question. I'll explain in a bit why I'm putting this first.

1 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. (I Corinthians 15:1-2)

So Paul says, "This is the Gospel – I'm going to remind you all what it is". Then he goes on to explain:

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, (I Corinthians 15:3-4)

Based on what we just read, the Gospel message has 4 parts.

- 1) Christ died for our sins.
- 2) This was predicted in the Scriptures.
- 3) Jesus rose again - he was resurrected from the dead.
- 4) We need to receive this message.

Paul said at the beginning of the passage we just read that his friends, the Corinthians, **received** the message. They believed it. This last part is very important. In another place (Ephesians 2:8-9), Paul said that salvation is a gift: a free gift. We don't work for it.

As I said, many of our readers today are familiar with this. But maybe some aren't? For those people, I'm going to ask: Would you like to learn how you can receive eternal life through Jesus Christ? Please contact us. Visit our web site: <https://www.trinityteaneck.org/>. You can learn how to contact us there. We'd love to explain all this to you.

This is why I'm putting this explanation of the Gospel first: In the second part of our study today, we're going to talk about things that involve effort. If I waited until the end of our discussion to invite people to follow Christ, they might become confused. They might think that salvation is something you must work for. This is one of the most important parts of the Christian story. We learn of God's love and his gift of Jesus Christ to mankind. When we receive the free gift of God, our hearts are changed. Hopefully, we then want to share what we've learned with others. We can't help ourselves.

Now that we understand this, we're ready to move on to the second question:

II. What does it take to be part of this great mission?

Now, we can't talk about everything in one session. As I said, what we will do is look at these four men. We'll see what made them unique.

We've said three of these four men formed a special core group. Those were Peter, John, and James. Later, there were times when Jesus allowed this group to see things that the other members of the twelve did not. For example, on one occasion Jesus took Peter, John and James up on a mountain. We're told this small group was alone. There on the mountain, the three men saw what's known as the "Transfiguration" of Jesus. The face of Jesus shined like the sun. Moses and Elijah spoke with him. It was an amazing picture of what Jesus would become after he ascended into heaven. We'll learn more about that event in Matthew 17. For now, it's important to know that for some reason, Jesus only shared this with three of the four men we're discussing today. He didn't share this with the whole group of 12 men. Things like this occurred on a number of occasions. After Jesus went up into heaven, these men became key leaders of the Twelve Apostles.

So again, what did Jesus see in these men that made him choose them for such an important role? Let's dig into our passage to find out.

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 send you out to fish for people." (Matthew 4:18-19)

What was unique about these men? We're told they were fishermen. What would make a fisherman the best candidate to lead the apostles of Jesus and from there the early church?

Let me suggest a few things. First and foremost, fishermen have a focus. Are you taking notes? Here it is: Fishermen catch fish. OK. That sounds a bit obvious, doesn't it? On the other hand, maybe not so much.

Let's think about this. What does it take to catch fish? You see, there's a whole mindset that goes with catching fish.

A. Fishing involves discomfort.

Fish live somewhere. They live in water. So, if you want to catch fish, you have to go either near or into water. If you do that, sooner or later, you'll get wet. If you like being dry, fishing isn't for you. Next, water tends to be colder than dry land. So, if you like to be warm and dry, fishing isn't for you. Also, most of the fish that people like to eat come out at times other than when people like to be awake. So, fishing often means begin out late at night or early in the morning, before sunrise. Now, some fish can be caught in the daytime. In that case, the fisherman has the sun beating down on him. There's not a lot of shade out on the water. Sometimes, when

you're out on the water, a storm comes along. Now, fishing has gotten dangerous. The list goes on. Fishing is full of things that make life uncomfortable. So, if you want to be comfortable, safe, warm, and dry, fishing isn't for you.

As we said, the mission of Jesus started with a message. But it also involves other things. Things that, to put it mildly, make life difficult and uncomfortable. Jesus needed people who would understand that. If we want to be part of the great mission, we need to understand that, too.

B. Fishing involves an action

In this case, Peter and Andrew were casting a net into the water. Consider this:

- Fishermen cast a net.
- They haul the net back.
- The net catches fish.

We just learned that Jesus started his mission with a message. He proclaimed that message. Another way to look at this is to say that Jesus cast out words. People heard the words, and some responded. In the same way that a net brings in fish, the words brought in people. They responded by believing and coming to Jesus. So, preaching the Gospel looks in some ways like casting a net.

Jesus apparently needed people who understood this core idea. His mission involves casting out or sending out a message. If we want to be part of the great mission, we need to understand this, too.

C. Fishing involves perseverance.

Sometimes, when fishermen cast out their net, they don't catch any fish. That's disappointing. Do you know what fishermen do next? They try again. They cast out the net again. They keep trying until they catch some fish. Sometimes, a given area is unproductive. So, the fishermen move on to another area. And they try there. This goes on for a long time.

Jesus apparently needed people who understood the need for perseverance. If we want to be part of the great mission, we need to understand this, too.

D. Fishing involves knowledge and skill.

Certain fish swim near the shore. Those were the kind that Peter and Andrew were looking for on this particular day. Others are found in deep water. You need a boat for those. In a body of water like the sea of Galilee, different fish are found in different areas.

If you're fishing with a net, you get certain kind of fish. When you make a net, the net has to be the right kind, with the right size. If the grid in the net is too small, the net will be too heavy. If the grid in the net is too large, fish will escape.

In some cases, fish require bait. You have to know what kind of bait to use to attract those fish. If you like to eat a certain kind of food, it doesn't mean that fish will like to eat that food. Imagine a person eating an apple, enjoying the apple, and then assuming all fish want to eat apples, too.

To be a good fisherman, you have to be knowledgeable and flexible. If you want to be a good fisherman, you have to **learn** how to fish. **Jesus apparently wanted people who were willing to learn.** If we want to be part of the great mission, we need to understand this, too. Stubborn people who don't think they need to learn anything have no place on this team.

E. Fishing involves a customer.

Whatever a fisherman catches, he has to sell to someone. This is the difference between an amateur and a professional fisherman. For the amateur, if you fish for an hour or fish all afternoon, what matters most is that you've spent time out in nature. It's quiet; it's peaceful. If you catch a fish, that's great. If you don't, well, you had a good time.

The professional doesn't have that option. He brings what he catches to his customers.

The first of this group to demonstrate that was Andrew. We learn about this in John chapter one. Let read about that:

35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. (John 1:35)

Here, we're talking about John the Baptist. He had disciples, people who followed him and his teaching. He's with two of them. One, we'll find in a minute, is Andrew. Many think the other is John, whom we read about in the passage we're studying today.

36 When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" 37 When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. 38 Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" 39 "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. 40 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. 41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter). (John 1:36-42)

So, Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist. When Jesus walked by, John pointed to him and said, “He’s the one – He’s the Messiah”. Andrew responded by spending time with Jesus. After he met Jesus, what did he do? He immediately told someone. He told his brother Simon and brought him to Jesus. Jesus later gave Simon a new name, “Peter”.

Here’s an interesting point: Jesus was a carpenter. Of his twelve apostles, none were carpenters. If Jesus was a carpenter, wouldn’t you think that Jesus would choose more carpenters? And if not carpenters, why did Jesus start with fishermen?

You see, it’s in the **focus** of these jobs. A carpenter **makes** things. They make those things out of wood. The carpenter takes a block of wood and uses saws and carving tools and hammers. He uses those tools to make the finished product. A fisherman, on the other hand, **finds** things. Once he finds those things, he hands them off to someone else.

In our passage, we read that Jesus commanded four men to follow him. He said, “Come, follow me,” ... “and I will send you out to fish for people.” We mentioned that some translations say, “I will make you into fishers of men”. The word that Matthew uses here can mean “Make” or “send out”. That’s why we see the two translations. They’re both good. At times like this, the New International Version, or NIV, likes to look at the effect of what was said. That’s why they chose to translate the word as “send”. That’s one meaning of the word, and that’s certainly going to be what Jesus will eventually do.

However, I prefer the translation “Make you fishers of men”, because that’s what a carpenter does. He makes things. This is important, because it involves the way we participate in the action of the Gospel. Like fishermen who cast out a net, we cast out words. Those words are the message of the Gospel. When people respond, it’s not our job to change them into something. We bring them to Jesus. We teach them what Jesus said. Jesus then works in their lives with his Holy spirit to change them. Perhaps this is why Jesus, a carpenter, chose four fishermen to form the core of his leadership team, the Twelve Apostles.

Jesus spent 30 years preparing for ministry. Part of that preparation was learning the career of carpentry. God prepared these four men to serve as leaders in the early church. Part of that preparation involved learning the career of fishing.

If we want to be part of the great mission, we need to understand this: **Jesus wants to make us into people who go fishing for other people.**

There are just a few more things. It turns out that this particular group of fishermen had even more qualities that made Jesus choose them.

Let’s read again: “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” 20 At once they left their nets and followed him. (Matthew 4:19)

What additional quality did these men have? **They were available.**

Being Available

Back in those days, when a great teacher invited someone to follow them, it meant something. It meant leaving behind whatever else a person might be doing in order to totally immerse themselves in the teaching of the master.

Jesus didn't invite: He commanded: "Come, follow me". How did Peter and Andrew respond? We're told that they *immediately* left their nets to follow Jesus. "At Once". Jesus didn't have to negotiate. Jesus certainly didn't have to beg. He commanded, "come", and these men immediately left their careers to follow Jesus.

This became even greater when Jesus calls James and John. Let's read about that:

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 4:21-22)

In Luke 5, we're told that these four men knew each other before this episode. In fact, the men are partners. Apparently, they're partners in something of considerable size. When Matthew introduces us to James and John, they're in a boat with their father. Owning a boat was no small thing at this time. Boats were expensive. When Mark tells this story, he mentions hired servants (Mark 1:19-20). It seems James and John managed other workers. So, these weren't just average workers. These were successful businessmen with a large business.

On top of this James and John are with their father. They're not just commanded to leave a successful business. *They're leaving their father.* And yet, Matthew tells us that these men immediately left the boat and their father to follow Jesus.

These men were not only available, they were willing to give up a great deal to follow the call of Jesus.

This is another amazing story. Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

Jesus, after preparing for 30 years, was ready to begin his mission. We've learned that his mission involved a message: The Gospel. The first thing Jesus did as he began his mission was to proclaim this message.

Next, Jesus called four men. We learned from this that Jesus always intended for his mission to be carried on by others. Others would spread the message of the Gospel after Jesus went up into heaven. Because of a lot of faithful people over 2000 years, the message has come to us. It's now our mission to proclaim that message.

We've met four men, Peter and Andrew, James and John. Jesus believed that these men were qualified to become the core of his leadership team; the Twelve Apostles. Jesus prepared for his mission, among other things, by learning how to be a carpenter. These men were prepared, among other things, by learning how to be fishermen.

They had a number of qualifications. The last thing we learned about them was the fact that they were available. They were willing to leave their careers, successful careers, to go through the training they would need to become leaders of the early church.

Having learned all this, before we close, we need to ask just one more question.

Does Jesus command everyone to leave their careers to follow him?

I'm going to give a personal opinion here. I believe the answer is, no, Jesus doesn't call everyone to leave their careers to follow him. Let me give an example. Later, in Matthew 8, we'll meet a man who is called only by his title: Centurion. A centurion was a military leader who commanded a large group of soldiers. They made a lot more money than the average foot soldier. Jesus was very impressed with this man. In particular, Jesus was impressed with this man's faith. This stands out because the Centurion wasn't Jewish; he was a Roman. Jesus said this: "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith." (Matthew 8:10) And yet, even though he was impressed with this man's faith, Jesus didn't tell the Centurion to stop being a military man. So, not everyone is called to leave their careers.

However, I believe in two things. First, I believe that **some people** are in fact called to leadership. Some of these people are called to leave behind other career options. As we study Matthew's book together, we'll learn more about what that looks like.

Secondly, although not everyone is called to be a leader, everyone is called to **something**. The Apostle Paul taught that everyone who receives Christ is given at least one spiritual gift. This is an ability to contribute to the life of the Church. Everyone is encouraged to find their gift and use it for God's glory. ***If we don't use our gifts, the church is weaker because of it.***

Certainly, everyone is called to be a disciple. You can be a disciple of Christ and still be a butcher, a baker, or a candle-stick maker. You can always learn about Jesus.

Here's a simple formula. The more you're willing to give to learn about Jesus, the more you're willing to obey when he calls, the more of him you will get. *And what you get will last for eternity.* This formula has an opposite: The less you're willing to give to learn about Jesus, the less you follow when he calls, the less of him you will get.

All of us are given an opportunity to meet the King of the Universe. We're all given the opportunity to learn from him, to walk with him, to follow him. How sad if we miss that opportunity.

Please pray about your place in the great mission.

Follow Jesus when he calls.

Let him teach you how to fish for people.