



“And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19).

The King Followed

Central Truth: Jesus desires to make His followers fishers of men.

L645. Date: January 10, 1982. **Text:** Matthew 4:12-24.

Topic: Christ: Teachings of; Disciples: Calling of; Discipleship.

“And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him” (Matthew 4:19, 20).

That call to discipleship (issued first by the Lord Jesus to Peter, Andrew, James, and John) is still going forth today. It is a call to total commitment to Jesus Christ. It is a call to total availability to His training. It is a call to productive and fruitful service in His name. It is a call to be a disciplined Christian in the fullest sense of the term.

A disciple is a follower, a learner. Each Christian is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. The great commission is “make disciples” by going, teaching, baptizing, and teaching people of all nations (Matthew 28:19, 20). The disciple of the Lord Jesus is called to “*be with him,*” learning and serving (Mark 3:14).

Jesus said, “*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*” (Matthew 4:19). Jesus makes fishers of His followers. He who is following is fishing for men. He who is not fishing for men is not following Jesus. Are you following and fishing?

I. CENTER OF HIS MINISTRY (Matthew 4:12-16)

Jesus' ministry began in Judaea. It began with His baptism at the hands of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-17). It continued with His temptation in the wilderness in relation to a forty-day fast (Matthew 4:1-11).

Returning to the area of Jordan, where John was preaching and baptizing, Jesus was identified by John as *“the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). John testified, *“I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God”* (John 1:34). Jesus was at last ready to begin His public ministry.

Many months passed between the events recorded in Matthew 4:11 and 4:12. Jesus called several disciples (John 1:29-51). He attended a marriage in Cana of Galilee and visited Capernaum (John 2:1-12). He returned to Jerusalem and cleansed the temple (John 2:13-25). He had the conversation on the new birth with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21) and conducted an extensive ministry in the land of Judaea, preaching and baptizing in the same area as John the Baptist was ministering (John 3:22, 23). But John the Baptist fell into political disfavor when he rebuked Herod for taking his sister-in-law as his own wife (Matthew 14:3-5). Jesus thought it wise to move out of that area because His increasing popularity would bring increasing opposition (John 4:1-3). His journey from Judaea led Him through Samaria where He met the woman at the well of Sychar and led many in that city to faith (John 4:4-43). It is at that point that Matthew 4:12 takes up the narrative of His life and work.

The center of Jesus' ministry became Capernaum, located on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was a busy commercial town, more tolerant than the conservative Jewish influences in Jerusalem and Judaea. Matthew seems delighted that Jesus should settle there, for it had been the apostle's home town and place of business before Jesus called him (Luke 5:27, 28). That area which some called “heathen Galilee” got the blessing of God upon it. Matthew quoted with joy from the writing of the prophet Isaiah, *“The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region of the shadow of death light is sprung up”* (Matthew 4:16). Yes, Capernaum, despised and neglected as it had been by the religious leaders of the day, had received the ministry of Him who is *“the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world”* (John 1:9).

II. CONTENT OF HIS MESSAGE (Matthew 4:17)

The early preaching of Jesus was the same message as that delivered by John the Baptist, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). Mark gave a slightly more detailed summary of His preaching, *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel”* (Mark 1:15).

The message called for spiritual preparation for the reign of God.

“Repent!” The word, used by Jesus and John the Baptist, carries the idea of changing one's mind and of changing one's direction because of a recognition of and sorrow over sin. The Jewish concept of repentance involves sincere sorrow for sin, restitution so far as possible, and a solemn commitment not to commit that particular sin again. That was necessary in order to welcome the reign of God.

The “kingdom of heaven” is the same as the “kingdom of God.” Each refers to the kingly rule from heaven as God exercises sovereignty over men. The idea of such a kingdom is the people — not the territory over which He reigns. For God to reign over a people, the people must be prepared spiritually. That is why the kingdom was related to a call to repentance.

The Bible teaches that the kingdom of God is eternal (Psalm 145:13) and universal (Psalm 103:19). It is recognized on earth in partial form now, but will come to its full consummation in the future (Revelation 11:15). Jesus preached that the kingdom which was coming had arrived (Matthew 12:28) because in the person of Jesus the kingdom was manifested. To become a disciple of Jesus and receive eternal life is to be a citizen of the kingdom (Mark 10:17-31; Matthew 19:16-30; John 3:3).

The Jewish understanding of the promised kingdom had been perverted through the generations. They looked for a political reign in which that nation would be dominant over world affairs. Jesus spoke of a different kind of kingdom — the spiritual reign of God in the hearts of men — and declared such a kingdom was already present in the world (Matthew 12:28). What a privilege it is to be a part of that blessed reign of God.

III. SELECTION OF HIS DISCIPLES (Matthew 4:18-22)

Jesus' disciples were selected by a personal call (verses 18, 21). His words *“Follow me”* were sufficient to enlist two pairs of brothers: Peter and Andrew who were sons of Jonah, and James and John who were sons of Zebedee. It may seem strange that they would respond to such a brief call on such a short notice. But they had already followed Jesus for a while as He ministered in Judaea (John 1:35-43).

Jesus stills calls by a personal invitation. Both for salvation and for service, He deals with us personally and individually. One of the wonders of His grace is that every person is so important to Him that He calls each of them by name (John 10:3, 11).

Jesus says to all of His disciples, *“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in*

my name, he may give it you” (John 15:16). That is the joy of following Him.

Those whom Jesus calls should give immediate response in obedience (verses 20, 22). The response of Peter and Andrew was “*straightway*,” while the response of James and John was “*immediately*.” There was no hesitation in either case. Why would men hesitate to respond to the call of Jesus? The highest honor imaginable is to be a personal disciple of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

The Lord had a purpose in mind when He called His disciples. He intended to make them “*fishers of men*” (verse 19). (The term “*fishers*” of men is used in Jeremiah 16:16 to refer to those who enslave men, but Jesus uses “*fishers of men*” to refer to those who save men by introducing them to the grace of God in Jesus Christ.)

Response to the call of Jesus often involves sacrifice (verses 20, 22). Peter and Andrew left their nets. James and John left their ship and their nets with the hired servants. Each made a sacrifice. They left their regular occupations by which they had their livelihood. They left their homes. They committed themselves to an uncertain future. Afterwards they said, “*Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee*” (Mark 10:28), and indeed they had. But they gained far more than they left (Mark 10:29). The Lord will be no man's debtor! When He takes away with His left hand He restores multiplied times with His right hand.

IV. SUCCESS OF HIS MINISTRY (Matthew 4:23-25)

The ministry of Jesus centered in teaching spiritual truth: “*preaching the gospel of the kingdom*” (verse 23). The “*gospel of the kingdom*” is not different from the Christian gospel set forth in the New Testament. The message of Jesus Christ is the good news that God reigns in the hearts of those who repent of sin and turn to Him in faith. Of course, Jesus taught on many different subjects and in different ways, but the main theme of all His preaching was the good news of the presence of the kingdom of heaven. “*It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe*” (I Corinthians 1:21).

Jesus was concerned about the physical suffering of men, so one part of His ministry was healing their bodies (verses 23, 24). His healing involved “*sickness, diseases, torments*.” (Those terms refer to differing seriousness in the types of physical maladies with which He dealt.) His power was sufficient over them all. His healing brought multitudes pressing upon Him for help (Mark 3:10).

Jesus was concerned to grant spiritual deliverance” from demonic oppression. *“Those which were possessed with devils”* were delivered (verse 24). Jesus recognized the presence and evil work of demons and dealt with them as agents of the devil.

All such wonderful works were an indication that God had come in mercy and love in the person of Jesus Christ. He had not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them (Luke 9:56).

The public as a whole responded to such a ministry of love and deliverance. Great multitudes followed Him. They came from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judaea, Syria, and beyond Jordan (verse 25). No wonder those who opposed Him said, *“Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him”* (John 12:19). The popularity was temporary, however. The day would come when some of the same multitude would cry out, *“Crucify him.”*

So the ministry of Jesus continued through its first year. This has been called “the year of popularity” because of His widespread acceptance among the people as a whole. His message was good news and His miracles brought relief to their bodies and peace to their minds. If they had accepted the spiritual content of His message, they would have entered into the full blessing of the kingdom of God in the hearts of men.

Jesus” said, *“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men”* (Matthew 4:19). This serious question we must propose, each to his own heart, “Am I following Jesus fully?”

1. How does Matthew 4:19 describe true discipleship?
2. How did the ministry of Jesus begin?
3. How did men become disciples of Jesus?
4. What prophecy was fulfilled by His ministry in Capernaum?
5. What was the theme of the preaching of Jesus?
6. What does it mean to “repent”?
7. What is “the kingdom of heaven”?
8. What does John 15:16 mean to you?
9. How can you be a good disciple of Jesus?
10. How can you be a “fisher for men”?