

“Are You Following Jesus?”

Mark 1:16-20

People often look to the stuff of life to overcome a profound sense of emptiness and boredom. ‘Boredom’ is defined as the state of feeling disinterested in one’s surroundings, having nothing to do, feeling that life is dull. The fact of the matter is that a lot of people are bored and unfulfilled in life, even within the church.

They are afflicted with a nagging sense that they should be doing something and that there is some meaningful purpose that they are supposed to be a part of.

But they can’t quite wrap their mind around what that is, and so, in the meantime, they try to look for something to occupy their time. They remind me of a man from California that I read about named Larry Walters who made headlines years ago for something crazy (I told this story at our last ‘Be Strong’ breakfast, so guys, indulge me for a minute). Larry purchased 42 used weather balloons, inflated them, and attached them to a lawn chair he had secured to the back of his pickup truck. With several of his buddies watching, he climbed into the chair, settled in, and had a friend cut the rope. Now, he was hoping to observe the neighborhood from a slightly different angle, and gain a new perspective on his life. He took nothing with him but a peanut butter sandwich, a six-pack, and fully loaded BB gun.

Two and a half hours later, the Los Angeles International Airport reported an Unidentified Flying Object in the skies above LAX at nearly 16,000 feet.

“Lawnchair Larry,” as he is now remembered, was three miles into the sky and 100 miles from his original launch site. The pilot of the 737 who first spotted Larry said, “Well...I see what looks like a perfectly still man sitting in a...is it a lawn chair? And I think he is holding a rifle.” In a remarkable rescue stunt, SWAT teams lassoed Larry, who had passed out in the chair, and ferried him

safely to the ground. His intention had been to slowly float up to the right altitude, then use his BB gun to pop the balloons. However, when he was cut loose from the pickup truck, eyewitnesses said he shot up into the air as if he had been fired from a cannon. He panicked and did the only thing he knew to do in a highly stressful situation—break open the six-pack. Back on the ground, Larry was promptly issued a fine for obstruction of airport traffic. A local journalist asked him three questions:

- Larry, were you scared? He said, “Yep.”
- Larry, would you do it again? He said, “Nope.”
- Larry, why did you do it to begin with? To which Larry said, “I guess I just got tired of sitting around.”

Now, I don't know about you, but I don't want to go through life with a sense of complacency, but neither do I want to fill my life with frivolous, empty pursuits. Not when there is a world around me that is lost and without Christ. Turn with me in your Bibles to Mark chapter 1. These verses record the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee. From verse 14 on, we have Mark's account of the ministry of the Lord Jesus—preaching, teaching, healing, casting out demons, all of which lead up to His greatest accomplishment, the triumph of the cross and rising from the dead. Jesus knew what His purpose on earth was and, as this text reveals, He fills with purpose the lives of those who follow Him in discipleship. (Read)

We've already seen from the first chapter of Mark that God the Father had a task for God the Son to accomplish. And everything in our Lord's life was directed toward that task. He began His ministry by preaching. Remember what we considered from verses 14-15:

“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’”

Mark shows how Jesus began His ministry by preaching a message of repentance and faith. This is the emphasis of the message that Jesus preaches as He begins His public ministry in Galilee. And Mark tells us when, where, and what Jesus preached. Both His words and His works show Him to be the Son of God, the Servant who has come to do His Father’s will. And now as those who follow Him, we too have been given a task. If Jesus’ task involved preaching the gospel, ministering to people, and ultimately giving His life on the cross, then what is our great task? Well, I think we are given a clue about that in what Jesus says to these men who become His first disciples—“Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.”

What is discipleship? We use that term a lot, but I’m not sure we fully understand what it means. Sometimes, we may think of discipleship only in terms of a class that we attend, or a program, or a maybe a merit badge we wear around. Or, we might even think that discipleship is an optional part of the Christian life for those who really have the time and the desire to go deeper, who live with their head in the clouds while the rest of us have to keep our feet on the ground. Now, if that is the idea you have of discipleship, go ahead and strike that notion right now. Discipleship is not reduced to a class, a program, a merit badge, and neither is it an optional part of the Christian life. To put it plain and simple, discipleship is following Jesus.

The simple fact of the matter is that everybody is following somebody. We’re all disciples of something or someone. The question is not, “Am I a disciple?” It’s who or what am I a disciple of? The question I have for you this morning is this,

“Are you following Jesus?” Before you answer that question, let’s take a look at what it means to follow Jesus.

1 – Following Jesus BEGINS with a gracious call (1:16-17)

“Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’”

The first thing that I want to show you about what it means to follow Jesus is that it begins with a gracious call. Verse 16 says that He was passing alongside the Sea of Galilee. Now, I’ve got to say that the Sea of Galilee was my favorite place during my time in Israel. I can see why Jesus loved it so much. Half of His recorded miracles were performed in the immediate vicinity of it. And as I told you last time, two-thirds of His ministry happened in the region of Galilee. So it is a very significant place. But not in terms of size. It is a tiny dot on a map, but it looms large in terms of its spiritual significance here in the pages of God’s Word. (See pictures from Israel)

Verse 16 says that He walked by the Sea of Galilee and He saw Simon and Andrew, and then He called them. Notice:

How Jesus initiates the call

Jesus came to where they were. They did not essentially come to Christ looking for Him, but He came to where they were. John’s account tells us that Andrew and Simon had met the Lord Jesus already a few months before, and in fact they started following Him then at the very outset of His ministry. It was at the baptism of Jesus where John said, “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” And these two brothers, Simon and Andrew, were first acquainted

with the Lord Jesus. Now, something happened that made them go back to their nets in Galilee. It could very well have been John's arrest, but now Jesus comes to them again where they are in Galilee, by the sea mending their nets, and He calls them to be His disciples.

The calling of the disciples is a reminder that every believer has a task to do, a calling to fulfill, and a responsibility to embrace. But before they are sent out for Christ, they are first drawn in by Christ. We learn from this example that all true service must first begin in God's presence. This same principle is illustrated in the lives of individuals from the Old Testament like Abraham and Moses.

Abraham is called by God to leave Ur of the Chaldeans and go to the place that God will show him. Moses is called by God while tending his father-in-law's flock. He will be a worshiper before he is a worker.

One thing to pay attention to in the passage is the way that Jesus comes to where they are, finds them where they are, and extends the call to follow Him. In fact, that's the word used in verse 20—"And immediately He called them." One of the most simple, common words in our vocabulary is the word 'call.' All of us understand that word and use it on a regular basis. We 'call' our kids to come to the table for dinner in the hope that they will respond. We 'call' our friends on the phone and hope that they will not ghost us and actually pick up the phone. A church 'calls' a pastor in hope that he will accept the offer to come and shepherd them. And when you are called by your employer, the call becomes equally compelling. All of us can remember as a kid the terror of being called to the principal's office.

And so really there are all kinds of calls. Most important is a divine sense of call. Just as God takes the initiative to call Abraham and Moses, the Lord Jesus takes the initiative to call these disciples. It brings up the very important issue of

calling. What does it mean to have the call of God on your life? He called Peter, Andrew, James, and John, but does He still call us to serve in some capacity today? If so, how does He do it? And how might I know if God is calling me? There's a sense in which every Christian has a calling on his or her life. While some say that its a mysterious and mystical thing, I don't believe it is complicated. There are three 'general callings' that we all have as believers:

- The call to salvation

In the Bible, the word 'call' is used most often to refer to God's initiative to bring people to Christ and to participate in His redemptive work in the world. In Romans 8, Paul is clear when he describes believers as those who are called according to God's own purpose.

- The call to sanctification

This is the call to pursue Christ-likeness in your life as a child of God. Believers have been called to holiness and separation from the world, called to be set apart for God.

1 Peter 1:14-15—“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.”

- The call to service

All of us have been called to serve God with our lives in a capacity that is according to our gifting. It is not that some are called to Christ and then go on to service, but it is that to be called by Christ is to be called to service. He doesn't invite some to be the servants and others to be the served, but all of us are called to be the servants. If you're saved, as those who have come to know the

Lord Jesus, all of us have a divine call upon our lives to make Him known to the world around us.

1 Peter 2:9—“But you are a chosen race, a royal priest-hood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

While there is a distinct call to serve in a vocational sense such as a pastor, an evangelist, or a missionary—because those are gifts from God that only He can give—there is no such distinction in Scripture between the call to salvation and the call to serve. You cannot split that one call in two. The call to be saved is the call to serve. The call to be saved is the call to discipleship. If you’re a Christian, you are a disciple. The call of Christ in the gospel is not simply a call to get all your sins washed away and get a ticket to heaven, it is the call of discipleship.

All of us are called to the task of sharing Christ and making disciples. Some of us have a vocational calling to do that with our lives in some pastoral function, yet in no way does that mean only a few are called to ministry. Rather, all of us are called in and sent out by Christ. This is something we learn from this passage. The disciples receive a divine call, one in which Jesus brought them close so they can be sent out. Responding to that call involves availability, it is a matter of teachability, and it requires dependability.

How Jesus issues the call

Coming to where they are, Jesus issues the call to these men and says, “Follow Me.” It is both an invitation as well as a command. The language is in the imperative tense. Here is someone with divine authority. Here is someone who has the inherent right to command us. In the ancient Jewish world, a disciple would ask a teacher if they could learn the Torah from him. The typical normal

pattern was that students sought out a rabbi, not the other way around. A young man who desired deeper study of the Law would pursue some respected teacher and request permission to become his disciple. If accepted, he would commit himself to following that rabbi closely—learning his interpretation of the Torah, imitating his way of life, and often leaving home to travel with him. In this system, the initiative belonged to the student, and the rabbi evaluated whether the candidate was worthy or capable enough to join his circle.

But here, however, Jesus reverses this pattern as it is the other way around. And not only that, but Jesus didn't ask. He gives an imperative. Instead of waiting for students to apply to Him, He actively seeks out disciples. As He walks along the Sea of Galilee, He calls Simon and Andrew while they are casting nets, and later calls James and John while they are mending theirs. These men are not scholars, not religious elites, but ordinary fishermen. Jesus approaches them directly and issues a commanding invitation—"Follow Me."

John 15:16—"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give it to you."

Jesus finds them where they are. That's the lesson that I want you to see. He came to them, and He does the very same thing in your life and mine. He is always, constantly, graciously calling us to obedience. He's always asking us to go a little further, and when we go back to our nets or we get distracted by other things, Jesus constantly comes to us and graciously says, "Follow Me, come on a little farther with Me." Following Jesus begins with a gracious call. He graciously came to where they were. And then there is a second thing I'll mention:

2—Following Jesus LEADS to a new obedience (1:18-20)

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’ And immediately they left their nets and followed Him. And going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed Him.”

As Jesus begins His ministry, He immediately begins to make an impact on the lives of people. In Mark’s quick-paced writing style, this pivotal moment has been stripped down to its simplest terms—Jesus called, they followed.

Charles Swindoll—*“This was not an exercise of blind faith for they would not have followed just any man walking that Galilean shoreline. There was something compelling about Jesus in His words, actions, and character. Having heard His teaching and witnessed His power in action, they had seen in Him many signs that He could be the long-awaited Messiah.”*

They knew and believed enough about Him that they didn’t hesitate to walk away from everything that was familiar to follow Him. In a sense, we’re given a real example of what repentance and belief looks like in a person’s life. Because when it truly shows up in a person’s life, it results in a new obedience.

“Follow”—*come fall in line behind; command rather than a request*

Following Jesus leads to a new obedience in our lives because discipleship is not merely believing in Christ but submitting to His authority. The response of Peter, Andrew, James, and John shows how disciples reflect a new pattern of obedience in their lives. Notice that it is:

Immediate obedience

As Jesus calls Peter and Andrew, notice verse 18 says, “Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.” The same thing is said about James and John down in verse 20, “And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed Him.” True discipleship does not delay obedience. When Christ calls, the proper response is prompt surrender and action.

Mark L. Strauss — *“Jesus speaks and people obey. It is His overwhelming presence and authority that demand a response. Throughout [Mark’s] gospel, Jesus’ words carry divine authority. When He speaks, demons are put to flight, diseases are healed, storm waves are calmed, and experts in debate are rendered speechless. Jesus speaks and acts with the authority of God.”*

Complete obedience

Verse 18 says they left their nets. Verse 20 says James and John not only left their nets but also their father and their boat. Their response shows us that following Jesus involves a willingness to place Him above every other loyalty, relationship, or security.

John MacArthur — *“That first call to the disciples was an illustration of the comprehensive call our Lord gives to all who would enter His kingdom—not the abandonment of an earthly career but of all earthly masters.”*

Matthew 10:39—**“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”**

Transforming obedience

In verse 17, Jesus tells them, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” Follow Me, and I will change your life. I’ll say more about this in a second,

but it shows how obedience isn't merely about external behavior but an inward transformation. As disciples follow Jesus Christ, He reshapes their desires, priorities, and purpose. There is a fundamental change that Jesus brings a person deep at the heart level.

3—Following Jesus RESULTS in a divine purpose (1:17)

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’”

The final thing that I want you to see is that following Jesus brings purpose to our lives which otherwise are lived in an aimless direction. People ‘follow’ a lot of things that they mistakenly think provide them purpose and fulfillment. We chase after stuff. We chase after those things we think will make us happy. When Jesus says, “Follow Me,” it is His way of saying to them, “Fall in line behind Me, become what I intend for you to be, let Me take precedence in your life, surrender totally to My cause.” This is the part of the gospel that has been missing in so much of the modern church. We’ve differentiated between being a Christian and being a disciple. However, there is no such distinction in the New Testament. It is interesting to me that the word ‘Christian’ only occurs three times in the NT. But do you want to know how many times the word ‘disciple’ occurs? Some 268 times! Jesus isn't simply looking for people to make decisions—He's looking for disciples. But apart from grace, there is no way for you and me to be like Jesus. We must receive His life before we can follow His lifestyle.

Ephesians 2:1-5—“And you were dead in trespasses and sins...and were by nature children of wrath. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our

trespasses, made us live together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.”

His word picture, ‘I will make you become fishers of men,’ would not have made much sense at the time. But after spending three and a half years with Jesus, watching Him and learning from Him, and then after His crucifixion and resurrection and final commissioning and the baptism of the Holy Spirit—the meaning would become clear. They would endure pain and face persecution. They would also know the depths of joy as others would come to believe in Jesus through their witness. They would be attacked and misunderstood. And nearly all of them would be killed as a result of their faith. In His omniscience, Jesus knew all of that. But instead of spelling out all the details, He simply says, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” And for now, He left it at that.

And beyond what they would go on to experience, Jesus knew who they would become. Simon Peter saw himself as little more than a simple fisherman. However, Jesus saw what Peter would become. Just like Michelangelo saw David in a block of marble, even so Jesus saw an apostle in a rough-neck fisherman. Grace would transform him.

Charles Spurgeon—*“When Christ calls us by His grace we ought not only to remember what we are, but we also ought to think of what He can make us...It did not seem a likely thing that lowly fishermen would develop into apostles; that men so handy with the net would be quite as much at home in preaching sermons and in instructing converts. One would have said, ‘How can these things be? You cannot make founders of churches out of peasants of Galilee.’ That is exactly what Christ did; and when we are brought low in the sight of God by a sense of our own unworthiness, we may feel encouraged to follow Jesus because of what He can make us...O you who see in yourselves at present*

nothing that is desirable, come you and follow Christ for the sake of what He can make out of you. Do you not hear His sweet voice calling to you, and saying, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men?'

Never doubt the fact that when Jesus calls you, He sees you as you are and as you are to become.

Romans 8:29-31 — “For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified. When then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

There is more to life than lawn chairs and six packs. There is more to life than living for the next trip, the next high, the next degree, the next big thing, or whatever. Jesus brings real purpose to the lives of those who trust Him, who abandon the nets they're prone to hold on to, who follow Him into the unknown. The way to find your life is to lose it for Jesus' sake. He turns your life upside down so that He can turn it right-side up. Being a disciple of Jesus involves surrender to Him and the urgent command to follow Him. And this is no less true today than it was for Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

Dallas Willard — “There is no problem in human life that [following] Jesus cannot solve.”

Maybe you've been on the fence for some time in your life, and you've not yet come to Christ for salvation. Come to Jesus and place your trust in Him. Jesus says, “Follow Me.” Or you may already be a Christian but find in your heart a growing desire to take your faith more seriously, to live with purpose. Jesus

says, "Follow Me." Or you may be a longtime follower of Jesus but feel like you've been in a rut. You're stuck, and you want to get unstuck, to once again know the joy of salvation. Jesus says, "Follow Me."

The gospel call is urgent, and the response is immediate. You don't need every question answered. You don't need to offer any more excuses. What's needed now is for you to 'leave your nets' and follow Jesus.

"Father, thank You for the grace in which you call us to faith in Your Son, Jesus Christ. He's the One we long to follow as our Master and Lord. He's the Master, we're disciples. He's Lord, we're servants. We ask that You keep us from an aimless and directionless approach to life. And as we follow You, Jesus, we trust that You will make us what You want us to be. In Jesus' name, Amen."