**The Call to Discipleship**

**Mark 1:14-20 (ESV)**

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***14*** *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God,* ***15*** *and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”* ***16*** *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.* ***17*** *And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.”* ***18*** *And immediately they left their nets and followed him.* ***19*** *And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending their nets.* ***20*** *And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.*

In 1519, Cortez landed at Vera Cruz to begin his conquest of Mexico. He knew that hardship and perhaps death faced him and his crew once he arrived on the shores. He only had 700 men. When they disembarked to go on shore, Cortez set fire to their 11 ships. His men were aghast! They recognized that their only means of ever going home was sinking into the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico. What did Cortez intend to communicate to his men by this bold action? He wanted them to know that there was no turning back. Now that they have arrived, there is no going home. This is their new land and they needed to be “all in.” Regardless of the dangers, regardless of the dismal position they might find themselves in, retreat is not an option.

When Jesus calls us to follow Him, our Lord teaches us a similar message. Jesus came into this world to establish a new kingdom. There is a conquest for Him to make, and that is the conquest against this kingdom of darkness that is present and active in this world. It’s the kingdom of this world. When Jesus calls disciples to follow Him, He is inviting us to participate in His kingdom and to submit ourselves to Him as King. He is going to call us to wage war, a spiritual war against this kingdom of this present world. It’s a kingdom of darkness that is ruled and reigned by the evil one himself and his minions. So Jesus’ conquest is not one of flesh and blood. But He invites His disciples to join Him in this spiritual conquest against sin and against the domain of rebellion against God. The Apostle Paul describes our introduction into the life of discipleship this way in Colossians 1. He says

**Colossians 1:13-14** He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

God the Father has delivered us from this kingdom that we were born into. It’s a kingdom of darkness and destruction. He has delivered us and He has transferred us into a new kingdom, and this is the kingdom of His beloved Son. It is in His Son that we have redemption. In other words, Christ has purchased us out of the slavery of this old kingdom into sonship, into the family relationship of this new kingdom. And He has given us the forgiveness of sins. So that condemnation of our sins; the shame, the guilt of that sin doesn’t follow us into this new kingdom. It’s amazing! It’s an amazing introduction into this new life.

Someone might ask, “What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?” I think we would be right to answer that a disciple is one who forsakes the kingdom of this world to live his or her life for the very best King and the very best kingdom. So it is a trade. We’re letting go of this kingdom in order to embrace a new kingdom and a new King. A disciple binds his or her life to the Master, Jesus, to this new Sovereign, in order to follow Him where ever He leads and to do whatever He says. That’s the life of the disciple. Jesus is now the Boss. Whatever He says, that’s what I’m going to believe, and that’s what I’m going to do. Wherever He leads, that’s where I’m going to go with my life. My life is not my own.

Jesus is just as clear about this path of discipleship. Unlike Cortez, Jesus calls us to devote ourselves not to a temporal reward, but to an eternal reward. Like Cortez, Jesus demands that His disciples not look backwards once we have embraced Christ. In Luke 9 Jesus says

**Luke 9:62** Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

That’s an important word for us as disciples. If I really want to be part of this kingdom, which is a kingdom of peace, a kingdom of righteousness, a kingdom that is whole, a kingdom of joy, I can’t put my hand to the plow. I can’t embrace Christ then look back and think, “Maybe I made the wrong decision. Maybe there is a better bargain over there. Maybe I can have both.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a book entitled *The Cost of Discipleship*. It’s worth reading. In that book he stated, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” That’s what discipleship is. It’s not so much a decision to pray a prayer and to be part of a church family. It’s saying, “I’m ready to lose the old life that I had in order to gain a new life. Christ calls me to die.”

Why would anyone follow Jesus for such a crazy kind of requirement? This is a kind of commitment that seems a bit unreasonable.Why would we yield our life over to Christ? The answer is because we know the reward that comes from that kind of yielding, that kind of commitment. We know that our embrace of Christ doesn’t cause us to lose our life. It actually causes us to find it. That’s what Jesus says in Matthew 16.

**Matthew 16:24** Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

What’s a cross? It’s an instrument of death. Jesus says, “You have to be ready to die if you’re going to follow me, because die, you will.”

**Matthew 16:25** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

We know that Jesus’ reward brings infinite joy, a joy that never ever ends. That’s why we follow Jesus. He’s the only One who can fulfill that kind of promise.

This morning we begin this series that we have entitled, *Follow the Leader*. We pray that by the end of our time in the Word considering this topic, we will not only know what it means to follow Jesus, but also that we as a church family together, would be following Him practically every day with passion. We open up our Bibles to Mark 1, where we read how Jesus begins His earthly ministry. He begins His earthly ministry first at His baptism, where He is commissioned by God.

**Mark 1:11** And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

Then He had temptation in the wilderness to show that this King, as He is being introduced to the world, is more powerful than the present ruler of this world, Satan. And now, Jesus is beginning His earthly ministry in verses 12 and following. The main idea that we’re going to learn from this is that whenwe follow Jesus, Jesus gives us new life and makes us into fishers of men. He gives us a whole new purpose for why we’re here. In this transaction, God is not the beneficiary of our commitment to Jesus, but rather, we are. We’re the ones who receive the blessing from this.

***14*** *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God,*

This is John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. What was Jesus doing at the very beginning of His ministry? It says He was proclaiming the gospel of God. He is being a herald. He is being an announcer. He’s announcing this new message. It’s an exciting message, and it’s a message about the gospel of God.

Mark immediately grabs our attention as he describes the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. He says that Jesus is coming preaching this gospel. The word “gospel” simply means good news. Who doesn’t want to hear good news? Perhaps a person has grown up in church and lived all your life in church, and you’ve heard “gospel, gospel, gospel,” and the meaning of that word has become rather dull to your heart. That’s a real shame! Every believer needs to capture the joy of this single term “gospel.” It means “good news” and it’s the very best of news!

Again, all of us are interested in good news. All of us have our ears perk up when we hear this term “good news.” This past week I was talking with my second son Daniel and his wife. They told Kimberly and I, “We have some good news!” Now, they have a little 9 month old. We thought maybe it was something about sweet little Asher. He’s been able to get some help with some of his allergies. We asked about that, but that wasn’t it. We know that Daniel has put in to perhaps come to Illinois, to the base in southern Illinois instead of being in New Jersey. We thought that would be it. But, no, that wasn’t it. What is the good news? He said, “We’re going to have another baby!” Wow! That is good news! That’s better than even the other two I guessed.

I remember after surgery for skin cancer, the doctor came out to me and he said, “I have some good news.” Do you think I’m interested in that? I kind of had an idea about what it might mean, but I still want to hear it. He said, “You’re cancer free!” Yes! That is good news!

Imagine your employer comes to you this next week and says, “I have some good news!” Would you say: “Why don’t you get back to me next month? I’ll hear it then.” No, you would say, “I’m excited about this! You’re telling me it’s good news. You’re saying that it’s going to be received as good news, so I’m interested. I want to know.” My ears perk up.

Mark begins the message about Jesus’ life and says He has come preaching the good news. It’s not just the good news of a family member who is loved. It’s not merely the good news of a physician, a doctor. It’s not merely the good news of an employer. This is the good news of God! Now, if there is anyone who has news that is really, really good, it’s God. That’s why your ears perk up. I want to hear more about this. So this gospel, this good news is of God in the sense that it’s first from God. He’s the source of this good news. He creates the good news. It’s about God and it brings us to God. It brings us into God Himself and into His blessing.

What is this good news? Well we trace the beginnings of discipleship through an understanding of the gospel, an understanding of good news, because that’s where discipleship begins. It begins with the gospel, the good news of God. As you’re taking notes, there are four elements of this gospel that are foundational to discipleship. First, this gospel relates to a kingdom.

**The Kingdom of the Gospel**

***15*** *and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;*

Modern Evangelicals don’t often think that the Gospel is an announcement about a new kingdom that’s at hand. We think in terms of the forgiveness of sin and the atoning sacrifice of Jesus and the resurrection and regeneration and the heart of man. All these are right gospel themes. All these are also fundamental to the gospel. But where Jesus begins is by explaining how this is good news about a kingdom. It’s a new kingdom. He calls it the kingdom of God. The apostles followed Jesus in this. We somehow have lost this emphasis, but the apostles certainly didn’t. When Paul is arrested and He is taken to Rome and he was under house arrest in Rome, he uses that as an opportunity to tell the gospel to everyone. So Acts 28:23 says this.

**Acts 28:23** From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God

So what is Paul talking about? He says, “I want to talk about a new kingdom.” Here he is at the epicenter of the greatest empire on earth, the Roman Empire. He’s in Rome and he says, “You might see some things that are impressive. It seems like they’re powerful. But I want to tell you about a new kingdom. It’s a new kingdom of God.” Luke goes on to say in Acts 28, that Paul was

**Luke 28:23** and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.

What is this kingdom of God?This is a kingdom where God the Son takes the reigns of power on earth from Satan and from the dominion of sin to establish righteousness, peace, joy and abundance. God has allowed this world of sin to be ruled by tyrants and fools throughout human history. Even the very best of human kings have failed miserably throughout time to repair the brokenness that is found in communities and in society. They fail not for a lack of intention or a lack of even motivation, but they lack power. They lack wisdom. They lack ability to move past the destruction that sin has brought into this world. And they lack power and wisdom and ability to overcome Satan’s rule. Satan is pressing lies and murder and deceit upon mankind.

Here’s the question: When the Messiah comes, will He be able to unseat Satan and establish a Kingdom of Light even though Satan will oppose Him with the kingdom of darkness? Will He be able to do that? That’s the question. Here is this king, this power, this ruler, Satan, who has ruled from the beginning of Adam all the way to the present time. His fingerprints are all over the place. Is a new king able? All through human history, the answer has been, no. There has not ever been one king who has been able to vanquish the brokenness that sin brought into the world. Is this King able? Here’s the answer: He is! He is worthy and He is able to establish a whole new kingdom. God promises that His Son will receive glory by bringing a new kingdom to this world of broken and messed up kingdoms.

God is in complete control of human history. He created a world free of sin, knowing that man would rebel and bring upon mankind sufferings of every sort. Throughout all human history, He has allowed people to seek for solutions to these problems that sin created. What are those problems? Well, there are problems like disease. There are problems like poverty. There are problems like conflicts. There are problems like broken families. There are problems like nations at war with nations. There are problems, problems, problems. All we have to do is read our newspapers to see the problems.

Let me ask you, as you think about the announcement of a new Kingdom and you think about the kingdom in which we’re in, isn’t that a little bit exciting? Especially during an election time when all the candidates are saying, “We can bring in a new kingdom. We can bring in peace and joy and prosperity and unity and finally attend to all the world’s problems.” Let me ask you: is anyone able among any of the candidates? The answer is, no, they are not. So isn’t it good news to know that God has sent His Son? At this time, God is sending His Son into the world to be King and to establish a new Kingdom.

God’s plan from the beginning was to show His glory by allowing the best of men to try and fail at establishing a kingdom of righteousness and peace all the way until the time would be fulfilled when it is right for His Messiah, His King to enter into this world and to sovereignly rule. God prophesied about His Son being the King all through the Old Testament. I wish we had time to break this apart. Let me just read through a couple of texts from Isaiah. I think this is really important for us to see that this is central to the gospel message. It’s not sort of off at the surface.

**Isaiah 2:2** It shall come to pass in the latter days

That’s why it’s so exciting when Jesus says the time has been fulfilled. All these prophets, Isaiah and others have said it’s going to come to pass in the latter days. Jesus is saying that now is the latter days.

**Isaiah 2:2** that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it,

Notice the earthiness of these passages. He’s not talking about heaven. He’s talking about nations on the earth that are going to flow to the mountain of God.

**Isaiah 2:3** and many peoples shall come,

He’s talking about ethnicities. These ethnicities will gather

**Isaiah 2:3** and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob,

He’s talking about Jerusalem and Israel from which this king is ruling. Let’s come to Him

**Isaiah 2:3** that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.”

The king is here and we need His wisdom. We need His power. We need His ability. Let’s go! And then he says

**Isaiah 2:3** For out of Zion shall go forth the law,

That’s a law of righteousness, of objective moral rightness.

**Isaiah 2:3** and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Now, he’s talking about the Messiah, this Prince.

**Isaiah 2:4** He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples;

He’s talking about a future day when the King is going to say, “You’re right. You’re wrong. Here’s the border,” and that’s going to be it. Now notice this because this next part is a passage that the United Nations has printed on the outside of the building. It’s a beautiful vision. They miss it, but it’s a beautiful vision right from Scripture. The nations

**Isaiah 2:4** and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

Now what’s so arrogant is that the United Nations prints that, the effect, but they refuse to print the first part of it which leads to the effect. That is that He, this Prince, this Messiah is going to come and judge between the nations. What they’re saying is that we can accomplish this effect if we just get together. But that will never happen until the King is seated on the throne. But that’s the Kingdom. And Jesus says “The time has been fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. It’s right here in front of us.”

Let’s skip ahead to Isaiah chapter 9. This is a passage which we love to see at Christmas time, and rightly so. But I want you to notice the kingdom aspects of it.

**Isaiah 9:6** For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder,

Oftentimes on Christmas cards it’s like, “Well, I don’t know what to really do with that. I like the part about the Son being given and the Child being born. I don’t know what to do about the government being upon His shoulder.” Well, the government has to do with the kingdom. This child that is going to be born is going to be the king who is going to rule over this real kingdom. I want you to notice again the earthly nature of this kingdom.

**Isaiah 9:6** and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

That’s a title of sovereignty; Prince. Then he says

**Isaiah 9:7** Of the increase of his government

It’s a government of a kingdom.

**Isaiah 9:7** and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom,

Again, that’s a real place. Isaiah understood that to be in Jerusalem, from which a king once sat.

**Isaiah 9:7** to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

So you can see why when Jesus announces “the kingdom of God is at hand,” that people who understood the Old Testament said, “Yes! This is what we’ve been longing for,” especially under a time of Roman rule. I want to read you one more passage. I know I don’t have time to, but I must!

**Isaiah 11:1** There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

Jesse, remember, was David’s dad. There’s going to be a person that comes forth from that family.

**Isaiah 11:2-8** And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,

This is, of course, the Messiah. This is a prophecy about this King, Jesus. It goes on to say

**Isaiah 11:3-4** He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,

Just a word will be enough to put everybody at peace.

**Isaiah 11:4** and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

They will be destroyed with a breath. It will not be with a long, protracted war. At that time when the King is on the throne, this King is all-sovereign, all-powerful with the breath towards those who rise up to bring unrighteousness, to bring wickedness, to bring war into this world. With a breath, they’ll be taken care of.

**Isaiah 11:5** Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

Not only this, not only will He bring about a kind of rule over the affairs of people, but when man sinned it affected all of creation. So, all of creation groans for this day and for this Kingdom. When Jesus sits upon the throne, He not only has the power over nations, but He also has power over the natural realm. So there won’t be things like earthquakes. There won’t be things like hurricanes that are so destructive. There won’t be things like tornadoes. Why not? Because with the word of His breath, Jesus says, “No more!” Even the animal kingdom…you watch animal shows and they look great. They show the lion. They show the little deer out there. It’s kind of interesting until all of a sudden the lion pounces and then they usually cut away and they talk about the law of nature. It’s very brutal! You don’t even want little kids to even see the kinds of brutality that takes place in the natural order. That’s not the way God created the world and that’s not what it will be when this King is on His throne, ruling over His kingdom. Look at what Isaiah says.

**Isaiah 11:6-8** The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,

Does that ever happen? Those of you who have lambs, I know we have some farmers who have some lambs. Do you ever put a wolf in there? (Laughter!)

**Isaiah 11:6** and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;

I love that because it describes even the fattened calf is going to be next to the lion. It’s not just going to be any calf, it’s a fattened calf. You know, really juicy! (Laughter!) They’re going to be able to be together in the same pen.

**Isaiah 11:6** and a little child shall lead them.

I love that! Have you ever seen a little toddler with a leopard, a lion, and a wolf, on a leash walking in your neighborhood? That’s what is going to happen. A little child will lead them just like they’re little kittens, little cute cuddly things. How does that happen? We have a new kingdom.

So when Jesus says “the kingdom of God is at hand,” if you’ve read your Old Testament, all of these images would make you say, “Whoa! It’s at hand!” We’re excited if we believe that this king can pull it off. That’s what the gospel is about. This King can pull it off and He does.

The question is, when Jesus entered this world and promised a new kingdom, did He bring this kingdom to earth? The answer is yes and no; or at least, not yet. There are parts of this kingdom that are already, and there are parts of this kingdom that are not yet. They are yet future. The rejection of the Messiah by the nation of Israel created a pause. We call that the church age. But yes, Jesus established a kingdom in which when He died and rose again, Satan’s power, using death and sin to subjugate mankind, was completely broken. So for all who follow Jesus, guess what? Sin doesn’t have control over me like it used to. Death doesn’t bring the fear that it used to because I don’t fear condemnation. I only know that death will enter me into eternal life. Jesus brought His Holy Spirit now to dwell inside of us who follow Him so that our hearts, which used to be hearts of stone, are now made hearts of flesh. All this has taken place. It’s a remarkable thing! The church is a remarkable display of the power of the King, as the church follows the King to see a new Kingdom that is established already, even in the midst of a kingdom of darkness, a kingdom of death.

But not yet have the nations come to peace. Not yet does righteousness rule in this world through governance. Not yet is there healing power to eradicate diseases, to eradicate the kind of conflicts in the natural order of things. Not yet is Jesus physically sitting upon the throne of David, ruling over the nations from that throne, having all the nations come to Him to say, “Lead us. Teach us.” That day is yet future. What a blessed day it is now to have the king already establish the spiritual aspects of His dominion. And what a great day it will be when He returns.

The call to discipleship is a call to experience the already blessings of the kingdom right now, and a call then to anticipate the not yet blessings of the kingdom of God in the future. He says this right now is at hand. So that’s the kingdom of the gospel. Now, what is the call?

**The Call to the Gospel**

How do I enter into this kingdom? Well Jesus says at the end of verse 15

***15*** *… repent and believe in the gospel.”*

These commands form the core of Jesus’ call to every person who meets Him. For every person, this becomes relevant. Repent of sin and believe in the gospel. It doesn’t matter whether you’re rich or poor, whether you’re moral or immoral, whether you’re churched or unchurched, whether you’re a Republican or a Democrat, here are the first words of Jesus to your soul. Repent and believe! These two are not two separate commands, but they are one and the same command. They are two sides of the same coin.

Repentance is a change of heart about sin. It’s a change of heart about self-rule. Repentance is a sorrowful discovery that my way of life is leading me into darkness and destruction. That’s a terrible discovery! It’s a necessary one because that’s true for all of us. And in recognizing that, we turn from that way of life. That’s repentance! We turn toward Jesus Christ our King, toward the life that He offers. That’s what believing in the gospel is. It’s a movement toward Christ. But this same movement that turns from self-rule is the same movement that turns toward Christ. We can differentiate them, but we can’t separate them. No one turns to Christ without turning away from self-rule. That can’t happen. Christ isn’t in that direction. So where there is no repentance, there can be no faith. But here is the call of Jesus.

***15*** *… repent and believe in the gospel.”*

It’s the good news of the kingdom, the good news of the king. Believing the gospel is a simple trust that Jesus is able and willing to provide the life that He promises, to bring forgiveness of sin that He promises. And in believing that He is able and willing to do that, we recognize He is the only One able and willing to bring about that kind of blessing, that kind of transformation, we turn to Him. We say, “God, I need You. I need Jesus Christ to rescue me.” That’s where the life of a disciple begins.

Friends, I would encourage you to evaluate every ministry and every minister on this basis. It’s just the most fundamental, foundational aspect. Jesus said here’s what you need to do to be my disciple. You need to repent and believe in the gospel. This has to be central for any ministry to be Christian, to be gospel. I would urge you because, while the apostles followed this pattern of Jesus calling men and women and children to repent and believe, and you can trace that all through the book of Acts, all through the letters, the epistles, that it seems to be more and more common for Christians, indeed, those who would name themselves as evangelicals, to depart from that centrality of the message because it’s a bit offensive. It’s a bit offensive to say, “You need to turn away from the life that you believe is good. Turn away from that and turn wholly to Christ. Take up your cross and follow Him.” That message never gets outdated. It’s never depressing to those who would receive it.

But let me say this. No person engages in Christian ministry without making the call to repent and believe as the cornerstone of every application. So, listen for that! Listen for that as you consider books that you’re reading or people you’re listening to online. Do I hear this message, “Repent and believe the gospel”? If you don’t hear it, it’s because it’s not there. It might sound Christian in every other way, but if this part is missing, it’s missing that which is life-giving at its root.

So the disciple of Jesus lives a life of repentance and faith. Discipleship disrupts everything about the course we were naturally on. It changes everything. Then after having that initial decision to follow Jesus, our whole life is about continual repentance and faith because we go to bed following Jesus and we wake up turning this way. “I have to get up in the morning and I have to repent again and turn from my way of life.” That’s what the life of discipleship is. Every day until we get to glory where we’re finally perfected, we wake up in the morning and all of a sudden, “How did I get here? I turned over at night and I’m following my own will and I need to consciously turn away and turn toward Christ.” Every day, “take up your cross daily,” Jesus says. Do it daily!

**The Character of the Gospel**

This is pretty amazing! We see this in verses 16-20. What an encouragement!

***16*** *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.* ***17*** *And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.”* ***18*** *And immediately they left their nets and followed him.* ***19*** *And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending their nets.* ***20*** *And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.*

I want you to notice the kinds of people Jesus chose to be His disciples, to be the ones who would come alongside and build His kingdom. If you were starting even a company, what kind of people would you choose to be central to the work? If you decided, not just a company, “I want to create a whole new kingdom. I want to create a nation.” What kind of people would you seek to enlist? Wouldn’t you seek to enlist people who had experience, who had great talents, who are the most talented people on earth, people who have resources, who have a lot of money that they could also contribute to invest because this is going to be hard? It’s going to be costly. Isn’t that the kind of people that you choose to help you start the company, let alone start a nation? But I want you to notice who Jesus chose. And notice that the disciples didn’t choose Jesus; Jesus chose the disciples. That’s grace! He called His disciples, but He was the one who chose them. Otherwise, they would have been left fishing the rest of their life. And He called fishermen, the most common of people.

Friends, let us always be aware that the strength of a church family, the strength of any part of God’s kingdom rests not in the nobility, in the might, in the wisdom and the resources of her people. But the strength of a church family lies in the simple faith of her people; ordinary people who turned the world upside down. The only way you can explain Christianity is the power of God. Here is Rome, saying, “We’re going to shut this thing down and we’re going to apply every resource to shut this thing down.” And here is Jesus saying, “I am the King. I will build my church. You will not shut her down!” And who won?

I think the presence of the Christian church is testimony to the veracity of the truthfulness of the gospel. It didn’t start with powerful people. It just started with simple, ordinary people like Peter and Andrew and James and John. If you ever wonder, “Do I have anything to offer the kingdom of God?” please understand that what you offer is not from your natural person. What you offer is from your faith, your humility, your neediness. That’s what we offer to connect us to Jesus and to His power.

**The Commission of the Gospel**

***17*** *And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.”*

If we follow, we will become fishers of men. So if we’re not fishers of men, guess what? Jesus says, “Follow me, and here’s what’s going to happen to every person who follows me. You will become fishers of men.”

So if we’re evaluating our discipleship and we say, “I’m really not fishing for men. I’m really not concerned about the lost. I’m not talking to the lost. I’m not talking about the kingdom to anyone. I’m not talking about the King. I’m not sharing of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and of His future glory. I’m not sharing that message with anyone.” Let me ask the question: Am I a follower of Jesus? Because now there’s a conflict between what Jesus says and what I’m experiencing. That’s a sobering thing, but it’s one that we all ought to ask. Am I a disciple of Jesus? One of the measures is am I fishing for me? Am I engaged in the work that Jesus was engaged in; seeking and saving the lost?

Every disciple of Jesus possesses an eternal purpose. This is one of the changes, one of the beauties of the kingdom. We’re not merely bound to a purpose that is temporal. These guys are fishermen. That is a noble calling and there is nothing wrong with being a fisherman. In fact, there’s everything right about being fishermen. They were being used to feed people, feed families, feed kids. It was the main staple of their diet in their region. If they didn’t do it, then a lot of bad things would happen. But Jesus says, “What I’m going to do is I’m going to expand it.” He didn’t call all the fishermen to leave their nets. He called these. But for many disciples, they said, “I’ll keep fishing, but also fish for men, too.” A disciple’s mission or purpose in life is always expanded now to connect to that which is eternal, that which is lasting.

Fishing for men is an interesting metaphor. I just want to take one moment to talk about it. Think about fishing. Again, in the 1st Century, they fished with nets. We usually have the rod in our hands. There is a group of guys from the church here who recently went down to the Current River and we fished for rainbow trout. If you don’t know what you’re doing, you’re going to come home with no rainbow trout. But we had some guys that knew what they were doing and so those of us who didn’t know what we were doing kind of followed around. We kind of said, “I want to be your disciple because I see you guys just yanking in the fish. Okay, tell me how to do this. What are you using?” I’m watching them to see how fast they’re cranking it in. Then sure enough, I was catching fish. I wasn’t doing it as well as the people who are experts, but I was catching fish. What must a fisherman do to learn how to be effective?

1. You have to enjoy fishing.

If you don’t enjoy fishing, you’re not going to go fishing. I would ask you, do you enjoy telling people who don’t know Jesus and are lost and dying and without purpose in life, do you enjoy telling them that there’s a new kingdom they can become part of?

2. They have to understand fish and they have to understand the water where fish swim.

Do you understand people a little bit? Do you say, “I’m kind of getting to understand who you are and what you’re about and your hopes and dreams. So then I can relate to you. I can relate something that would connect to you.”

3. They have to go where the fish are.

So we can’t just stay inside the church. We have to go out and say, “How can I connect?” I know that’s even harder for me than maybe for you because I work in a church. So I have to work. I have to get out there to get to where fish are.

4. They have to be patient.

In this place, it was very frustrating in parts because the water was crystal clear. There are literally rainbow trout swimming all around. They’re running between your legs and all that stuff. You’re out there and you can see them, but they’re not biting. What in the world? You have to be really patient and know eventually, one will get interested. But you have to be patient. In other words, a person that says, “I told them the gospel two years ago and they didn’t listen to it.” What? No fisherman is going to catch trout if they think “I threw my line in the water once and I didn’t get anything. Let’s go home.” You just keep being patient with that process.

5. They have to be brave.

We didn’t have to be so brave, but these guys, Peter, James and John had to get out there when the weather was bad. I know lack of courage or fear is one of the biggest hindrances on why we’re not fishing for people.

6. They have to persevere when they get skunked.

In other words, they can’t quit. They can’t say, “I’ve shared the gospel so often and nobody has ever come to Christ.”

7. They have to learn from others and from their own observation.

Again, all the fishermen I know are always working on becoming better, more informed.

8. They have to put a line or net in the water.

They can’t just talk about fishing. The guys I went with, we met beforehand and we talked about fishing beforehand. But guess what? During that meeting when we met to talk about fishing, we didn’t catch any fish. We could have met ten more times to talk about fishing, but we wouldn’t have caught any fish. It wasn’t until we put a line in the water. “Okay, it’s going to go. Let’s see what happens.”

9. They have to be confident that their labors are not empty or they’ll get discouraged.

If you think there are no fish or no fish will ever come, here’s what God says on the basis of the resurrected Christ.

**1 Corinthians 15:58** Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

It’s never ever, ever in vain! How can that promise be made? The answer is because there is a King who is sovereign over everything. The King makes sure that His servants, His people’s labors are never empty; never, ever, ever!

10. They have to work at it.

Fishing wasn’t recreational for these guys. It was intentional. They said, “This is what my life is going to be about.” If you’re a follower of Jesus, Jesus says you will fish for men. Paul would say

**Romans 1:16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

I would ask you just by way of application: Won’t you pray this week and say, “God, would you show me two people who you would send my way, to share about the King and about the Kingdom? Would you show them to me this week so I can begin this work of fishing?”

What a wonderful call God makes when He calls us to be disciples! I would ask you: Are you a disciple? Have you humbled yourself before God and said, “God, the path I was on toward self-rule, self-determination, I realize it leads to darkness and misery and destruction. Jesus is a better king than I am. I’m a miserable king and I make miserable decisions. Jesus makes the best of decisions. He’s all-powerful. I need Him to be my King and I trust in Him to be my Savior.” Have you ever trusted in Christ as your Savior? Trust in Him today, where you’re sitting.

If you have trusted in Christ as your Savior, in this journey called discipleship, and it’s a path. Have you stopped and now you’re in a pause, perhaps? As you’re following Jesus have you maybe looked back and thought, “I think this world might have some stuff for me.” Where are you on this path? Are you moving forward? That’s what this series is about. Let’s move forward together with Christ.