

## **Four Galilean Fishers of Men**

Call to Worship: Psalm 117

1st Scripture: John 1:35-42; Luke 5:1-11

2nd Scripture: Matthew 4:18-22

Hymn Insert- *10,000 Reasons*

Hymn #550- *Jesus, Priceless Treasure*

Hymn #493- *Who is on the Lord's Side?*

### **Introduction**

We saw last time that Jesus spent a significant portion of His ministry up in Galilee, which, in fulfillment of Isaiah 9, enabled Him to be a light to the Gentiles. This morning, we trek with our Lord along the coast of the Sea of Galilee, where He begins to make preparations for the building of His church, upon laying the Cornerstone by means of His own death and resurrection. Here, He will call out, set apart, and begin to train, the first four of His twelve Apostles, who will be entrusted with the difficult, and yet, privileged task of laying the foundation of the church, by means of the proclamation of the Gospel.

The Kingdom of God has arrived, and those who enter it, must do so, by God's means, which requires a change of heart, and not merely the outward show which has been presented by the religion of the Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees. These ordinary, Galilean fishermen, will be set apart unto proclaiming the way into this kingdom. And it is no wonder then, that in Chapter 5, Matthew moves into the Beatitudes and the great Sermon on the Mount, which thoroughly describes the type of heart and life that will evidence those virtues and qualities that will (and must) identify all who are truly part of God's Kingdom in Christ.

That said, let us then move on, to consider our Lord's calling and setting apart of these four Galilean fishermen, who are to become fishers *of* men.

### **I. Four Galilean Fishers of Men**

Now, as we examine this text, it is important to recognize something that can only be understood in the light of what we are told in the Gospel of John, which will help us pull out the true meaning of this text, so that we don't misinterpret, and thereby, misapply it.

If you read this text, on its own, without any consideration of John's Gospel (and Luke's, for that matter), you could easily be led to think that this is the first time Jesus meets these four

men; Peter, Andrew, James and John. And you might be led to say, “Well, look at that! Jesus just walks up to these random fishermen, and exercising divine power, He states, “Follow Me,” and then, totally mesmerized and entranced by His divine sway, they immediately get up, leave their boats behind, and follow Him. And then, you can speak about the amazing power of God, in calling sinners to Himself, as seen here in this account...etc. Now, without diminishing the awesome power of the Holy Spirit, in regenerating and effectually calling people into the kingdom of God by the Gospel, this text is not given for that purpose, and it would be a mishandling of Scripture to apply that truth here.

Matthew’s purpose here is not to emphasize the salvation of these four men. Rather, he is addressing their specific calling into the Gospel ministry. In other words, Christ is calling them out of their original profession and livelihood, so as to prepare them for the great work of preaching the Gospel and building His church. Now, how can I be certain of this, beyond the immediate context (which we will be looking at in a moment)?

1) These men have already met, spent time with, and embraced Jesus, as the Messiah. We saw this very clearly, in our first Scripture reading (in John’s Gospel), at least with Andrew and Peter. These men were already disciples of John the Baptist, had already been baptized by John the Baptist, and were waiting for the revealing of the Messiah. And after John pointed Him out to Andrew, Andrew went and got Peter, and they went and met Jesus, and began to follow Him, in a salvific sense. And so, they already knew, interacted with, and spent time with Jesus, prior to this special calling, away from their present occupation and into the Gospel ministry.

2) In the Scripture that we read from Luke’s Gospel (Chapter 5:1ff), which is a parallel account to our main text (here in the Gospel of Matthew), we found a fuller description of what had happened when Jesus had commanded these fishermen to follow Him on this occasion. There, we found that Jesus was teaching by the Sea of Galilee, and he got into Simon Peter’s boat, and pushed away from the shore a bit, so that He could address the multitude more effectively. They were crowding around Him, and so, He needed to distance Himself a bit, so that, He could address the large multitude, as a whole. Now, generally, you don’t get into a boat belonging to someone you don’t know. Of course, Peter knew Him already.

But then, after He had finished teaching the multitude, the Lord commanded Peter to launch out further into the sea, and to cast down their nets for a catch. And, we can recall that scene, where Peter, calling our Lord, “Master” (again, indicating that he had already had a salvific relationship with the Messiah), replied, “We’ve been fishing hard all night and haven’t caught a single fish. However, since you say so, in obedience to Your Word, we’ll give it another shot.” And then, of course, they do so, and they catch so many fish that the nets are about to snap, and the boat is ready to sink. Indeed, they have to call over to their partners, James and John, to help bear the load, and they do so, and they are all deeply amazed. Peter is so amazed that he gets a sense of the divine nature of the Lord, and he falls down to his knees and pleads with the Lord to depart, because he comes to appreciate the gravity of his sin, in the presence of this divine Being.

And it is in this context then, that our Lord commands the four fishermen; Andrew, Peter, James and John, to follow Him; to leave their present occupation as fishermen behind, so as to be trained unto becoming fishers of men; men, who will cast out the line of the Gospel, seeking to bring a lost people into the glorious kingdom of God.

And so, brethren, this is the background and full explanation of what happens, when our Lord calls these men to follow Him, here in Matthew’s gospel. The emphasis is not so much on their salvation (although, their estimation of the glory of the Messiah definitely goes up several notches), as it is, in their being separated unto the ministry of the Gospel, soon to be made Apostles, taken out of the multitude of followers and disciples, who had followed Jesus around throughout the course of His ministry.

## **II. The Purpose of the Miracle**

Now, before we consider Matthew’s limited and condensed use of this event, let me just make a few comments about the purpose of our Lord’s use of the miracle (bringing all of the fish into their nets), as a means of accompanying His calling upon these fishermen, to leave their present occupation to follow Him.

1) By the imagery provided by the miracle, our Lord was giving His future Apostles an illustrious principle which was to govern their understanding of how exactly they were to bring

men into the kingdom of God. Simply put, they were to cast the net in accordance with the Lord's directions. In other words, though every temptation might be present to do otherwise; though human wisdom might provide them with creative ways of bringing people into the kingdom, trusting God and not themselves, they were to simply cast the net out into the sea of the world.

And of course, in a much more direct sense, this "net casting" involved nothing more or less than simply preaching the unadulterated message of the Gospel! God would be glorified in the simple, faithful act of preaching the foolishness of the message to all peoples, Jews and Greeks. And while it might seem foolish to the Greeks (who would be looking for something more "thought worthy") and offensive to the Jews (who would be inclined toward self-righteousness), as Paul states in Corinthians, it is this Gospel which would contain (or be accompanied by) the power of God, causing all to see and believe, whom God intends to save. And so, the first simple directive, given by this miraculous illustration was to simply, faithfully cast the net, in accordance with the Lord's instructions. And while our own natural thoughts would be inclined to doubt God's method of saving, even as Peter stated, "Lord, we've been fishing all night and have caught nothing (the Sea just seems empty right now), like Peter as well, contrary to our own logic, feelings and emotions, we ought to say, "Nevertheless, at Your Word, Lord, we will cast the net again."

2) By the imagery provided by the miracle, our Lord was also giving His future Apostles an illustrious principle which was to govern their understanding of *how exactly they would* bring men into the kingdom of God, by preaching the simple Gospel. God Himself, exercising divine power, would bring people into the net that they cast.

Even as our Lord exercised undeniable power in bringing a multitude of fish into the net, when the disciples followed His instructions, He would exercise divine power in bringing many people into union with Him, and into the Kingdom of God, by the simple proclamation of the Gospel! Salvation is a work of God the Holy Spirit, whereby, God effectually calls all of His true and elect children into His Kingdom by means of the proclaimed Gospel. And to this end, these four Galilean fishermen, would become fishers of men.

But sadly, brethren, all throughout history there have been no small amount of preachers who have felt the need to add to, take away from, or completely change the Gospel message altogether, thinking that by their creative abilities, they would know better how to bring people into the Kingdom of God. Relying on pragmatic gimmicks, inoffensive, politically correct language and man-centered methods, they distort the true gospel, bringing forth a message that has absolutely no power to save, because the power of God does not accompany their man-centered message. And therefore, they build coliseums filled with goats, who are attracted to worldly appeals, and not “spiritual life giving and changing” words.

But brethren, before we move into our final point for this morning, consider the encouraging principle found in our text, here. No, none of us are called to be Apostles. No, many are not called to be pastors and elders. But, we are all called to evangelize, and this event gives us every incentive to do so, with confidence...not in our selves, but in God. You see, whether you are the Apostle Paul or a lowly Samaritan woman, if you simply have a knowledge of the Gospel and confidence in God’s power to save, you have all that you need to effectively cast the net of the gospel, which God will use to save sinners. God has been saving, and will continue to save, through the spread of the Gospel. Recognizing that only God can ultimately save, and also that it is God’s desire and design to save, should motivate us all, to freely and consistently proclaim the Gospel, trusting that God will do His good work, in His perfect timing. Your job is not to save. Your job is simply to cast the net! [After death of James/Stephen in Acts]

This then brings us to our final point, brethren, coming back to Matthew’s shortened account of this event.

### **III. Matthew’s Purpose in Recording this Event**

In Matthew’s account of this event, why doesn’t he record the miracle that Jesus did, which provided a compelling motivation for our Lord’s disciples to forsake their present occupation, so as to become fishers of men? Indeed, why is Matthews account so short, leaving out a large portion of what happened at this event?

Let me suggest to you that Matthew’s primary purpose, writing to a Jewish audience, was to limit the details that he had provided throughout his gospel, so as to suit the specific design of

the whole of His Gospel. Where details were essential to serving his overall purpose, rest assured, he gives them, but where they are not necessary, he does all he can to avoid eclipsing the main thrust of his message, which was to present Jesus as the Jewish Messiah (prophesied about all throughout the OT), sent for the salvation of all nations, while exposing the utter corruption and insufficient religiosity of the Jewish religious leaders. He wants to present Jesus as the Christ, who brings forth God's intended religion of the heart, which comes only through faith in, and by union with Christ, and which alone meets the necessary qualifications for being a citizen of the Kingdom of God, which had now come upon them. That is why Matthew devoted lengthy chapters to recording virtually the entire Sermon on the Mount, which we are quickly approaching. And that is why, when Matthew gives very specific details, as opposed to generalities, we ought to pay careful attention to those details, because they carry significant weight into his overall purpose.

And so, here Matthew presents these *ordinary* fishermen, in contradistinction to the *high end* Pharisees and Scribes, as those who, by grace, would be given the authority to call and welcome people into God's kingdom. God's appointed leaders are not self-righteous. They are poor in spirit. God's leaders are not arrogant and proud. They are humble, lowly and love mercy. God's leaders don't stand above and beyond their followers. They lead by example. They are servant leaders, living out the quality of godliness that is exemplified by the Lord Jesus Christ, who later washes the feet of His disciples, and lays down His own life for them.

And so, Matthew's emphasis here is not simply on the power behind the calling, but rather, on the quality of men who were called, again, in contradistinction to the exalted, proud, arrogant, self-righteous leaders, who had no part in the kingdom of God themselves, let alone, that they should lead others into it. Indeed, Matthew's message is that, ultimately, all people, Jew and Gentile, desperately need the same salvation from the same source, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came not to bolster modern day Judaism, but rather, to bring about the true Kingdom of God, toward which, the entire Old Covenant religion pointed in shadows and types.

And so, this, I believe, is why Matthew limits the details about certain events, so as to highlight important factors that relate to his overall theme.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

All in all, brethren, what you find Matthew doing throughout the course of his Gospel, is seeking to help his Jewish readers understand the true nature of the Kingdom of God, so that, they might enter it. And what makes this task particularly difficult for the Jews, is that they have a hard time understanding that while this kingdom has had its seeds sown in the nation of Israel, by means of the promise given to Abraham, it was sown in the same soil, within which, Covenant promises were given to the physical nation of Israel, as well, which were tied to the land and the material and physical blessings granted to Israel based upon their obedience to their covenant with God through Abraham and Moses. It didn't take long for the Jews to conflate the two seeds, presuming that because one was a physical descendent of Abraham, that he was automatically also the object of God's eternal blessings given in the promise.

And so, the promise of God's eternal kingdom was given, alongside of God's covenant with Israel, where He promised to make them His people and to make them a great nation...etc. But, all along, not all ethnic Israel; not all of the physical descendants of Abraham were to benefit from the promise given to Abraham, concerning the eternal kingdom of God. In fact, most did not partake of this promise, even though all were part of the Old Covenant. It was only a remnant; only those who shared the same faith of Abraham, who would receive the blessings attached to the promise. As the Apostle Paul well notes, not all *physical* Israel is the true Israel of God, who would be welcomed into God's eternal and righteous kingdom. And the religious leaders of our Lord's time, not only sought to conflate the promise with the Old Covenant, but they further served to corrupt both, by attempting to make law keeping and outward obedience to the Mosaic Law, the means of obtaining God's eternal favor and blessing, the whole time assuming that being a *physical* descendent of Abraham automatically granted them access into the eternal kingdom of God.

And so, what we find Matthew (and the New Testament writers) doing, is attempting to surgically remove/separate the Promise from the Old Covenant, now that the Christ has come and fulfilled all that was required unto bringing about the fulfillment of the Promise. In other words, in Christ, the Promise itself, like a growing stem and bud, finally blooms into the New Covenant. Once Christ has fulfilled all of the terms and stipulations, the promise itself takes on

its intended form as a *covenant*. It transitions into the New Covenant, which is entered by any and all, who are united to Christ by faith. And those who enter into this covenant by faith, are the true Israel of God, and the true Children of Abraham, receiving the circumcision of the heart, and not merely the circumcision of the flesh. In Christ, the shadows that were attached to the Old Covenant meet their intended substance, as the Promise itself becomes the New Covenant, and the Old Covenant and all of its physical, material glory, fades away.

Matthew's task is to unravel this transition and change, to the Jews themselves. And this is why he focuses on those particular details that would highlight this reality. And this is why Luke, who writes to Gentiles, and John, probably writing to Romans, utilize different factual aspects of our Lord's life, teaching and ministry, to suit the understanding of their particular audiences.

And what is the good and glorious news that is found in all of this, friends? By these means, we find that, in the midst of a world of sin and corruption and suffering and death, all of which identify with our fallen nature and condition, God is separating a Kingdom for Himself, in and by and through His Son. And today, right now, you have access to this eternal, righteous kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ. And why is Christ so necessary to escape the defilement of this world and to enter into the presence of God eternally? Because, it is only through Christ, that your sins (your unholy offenses against God's holy character), can be forgiven and washed away. The Gospel!!! [Note: You can't earn or work your way in...that was the problem which plagued the Jews...etc]

Amen!!!

Benediction: