

Called To Follow

BIG IDEA: When Jesus calls us to follow after Him, the miraculous response on our part is that we drop what we're doing and immediately go after him.

Matthew 4:18-22 || by Jeff Sparks

INTRODUCTION

[slide] Discipleship Series Graphic

Good morning! My name is Jeff Sparks—one of the pastors here at Colonial—and I'm so glad to be with you again at this service and launch a 4-week series on Discipleship.

You can see the 4-week series outline in the graphic on the screen:

Week 1 (today) Follow / Week2: Grow / Week3: Serve / Week4: Bear Fruit

Of course, there's so much to Discipleship than this, but these are FOUR of the ESSENTIAL BIG IDEAS of Discipleship that are ALSO VERY CLEAR in SCRIPTURE.

IF you have been wanting to understand DISCIPLESHIP better, THIS 4-week series will be a very good place to begin your discovery—or rediscovery—of the BASIC ESSENTIALS of Discipleship.

IT'S WEEK 1—so today, we're going to go all the way back to the origin of Discipleship in the New Testament.

Matthew 4:18-22 will be our text for this morning. And as we do each Sunday, please stand as we read God's Word aloud.

Bible Passage

Matthew 4:18-22

18 While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 19 And he said to them, **“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”** 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

21 And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

You May be Seated. Let us Pray.

PRAYER

PRAYER

Merciful God and Father, as we approach Your Word this morning, we are so grateful that You are pleased to come to us . . . to speak to us . . . and call us to Christ through Your Word.

Grant to all of us who speak and hear Your word this morning, an abundance of Grace and help, so that we may not be only hearers of Your Word, but doers also.

We for this in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Illustration

Let's begin our time together this morning by playing a game!

Here are the instructions: I'm going to say a word and you are going to capture the first image that IMMEDIATELY pops into your mind.

Let's practice first.

What image pops into your mind when I say . . . politician.[1, 2, 3] That's probably a little unfair since its an election year,

Let me try again . . . astronaut.[1, 2] Try to recall that first, immediate image of an astronaut, before it changes. Brain science tells us that one side of our brain will toss up to us the most natural image that comes to mind, and then the other side of our brain will replace the image with a more appropriate result.

You're doing great! Now, I'm going to pick up the pace. What image comes to mind when I say:

. Movie Star Sergeant Christian. Plumber . . Athlete . Disciple

Okay, times up. You are all very good at this game!

So when I said the word . . . Christian . . . can you remember the image that immediately popped into your mind?

How about when I said . . . Disciple . . . what was the first image that popped into your mind then?

It doesn't really matter what image popped up for . . . CHRISTIAN or what image popped up for . . . DISCIPLE

My guess is, the two images were not the same. Am I right?

SEGUE

The point of this game--this exercise--is to call to our attention that, in the New Testament makes no distinction between the two.

More than that, the word "Christian" is used only 3 times in the New Testament, and the word "Disciple" is used 281 times!

Quote

"Many Christians today . . . have salvation figured out. But if you were to ask them about discipleship, they might hesitate or look at you with confusion. Discipleship? What does Discipleship have to do with becoming a Christian?"

Bill Hull, Conversion and Discipleship

Explanation

So it's interesting that the primary description of a believer in the New Testament is the description of what believers do: they FOLLOW JESUS and tell others about Jesus so that they can follow Jesus too.

In fact, it's in the wake of a Disciple-Making Movement in the Roman city of Antioch, Syria that the Word "Christian" first emerges to describe the Followers of Jesus. The new Christians in Antioch were not Apostles, Pastors, or Super-talented Evangelists. They were just regular DISCIPLES MAKING DISCIPLES. BUT there was something about JESUS' Call to "FOLLOWING ME" that brought to them a passionate zeal to Grow in Following Jesus and a Zeal to "Go and Make Disciples" as Jesus Commands in Matthew 28.

These Antioch Christians understood something about FOLLOWING JESUS that--as our mental picture game showed us--that completely transformed their lives and changed all of their priorities in life. John Mark Comer, in his book Practicing The Way, describes the transformation of anyone called by JESUS to "FOLLOW ME". **Through the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit . . . They were with Jesus // They became like Jesus // and They did what Jesus did.**

Whether it's Antioch in the New Testament, or people in our own church today, when any of us respond to the work of the Holy Spirit calling us to Christ through the Gospel, and "believes in Jesus and gain eternal life" (John 3:16) a miracle of God has occurred! We have been moved by God from darkness to light, from eternal damnation to eternal life, from being separated from God to Following Christ.

Our salvation in Christ is always a miraculous act of God, and our own priorities cease to exist. You can see this in our text:

We marvel at the miraculous disciple-making movement that is launched by the first Christians; but the truth is, if those Christians could have looked into the future and saw

the Christian Church today, it's very likely that they would marvel at how rare that is today.

For those Christians in Antioch, their own priorities ceased to exist: they were with Jesus, they became like Jesus, and they did what Jesus did.

Dale Losch writes, "We are told in Acts 11 that the followers of Jesus [disciples] looked so much like Him that "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." A brand new term was coined for Jesus-followers. These followers looked so much like Jesus that they were called Christians, meaning "little Christs." Dale Losch, A Better Way.

Going back to our WORD GAME > we can see that, in the New Testament (especially in Acts) there was no distinction between an image of a disciple (who is, by the way, making disciples) and the image of a Christian. They were one and the same.

It is my hope that over the next four weeks, the picture of YOU and ME BEING A FOLLOWER OF JESUS and the picture of YOU and ME BEING A CHRISTIAN, begin to move closer to becoming the same picture, and we can begin to see those images start to overlap.

After all, if you're like me, I want to be a lot more like those Christians who understood Jesus call to "Follow Me" in a much different way than we usually see it today. And as our SIGN-UP for FALL GROUPS will be coming in August, I invite you to choose a group that will help you begin to merge those two pictures into one. One group I'll be leading is called **Practicing the Way**, and there are some others this Fall that will guide you in "Following Jesus" and there will be more opportunities down the road.

With that in mind, today, I'd like to take us back to the place where DISCIPLESHIP begins in the New Testament, back to its origin so that we can gain some practical insight into what FOLLOWING JESUS meant for those Christians in Antioch and what it means for us today.

EXPOSITION

Turning back to our text from Matthew 4, and as I read it, picture the scene, and watch the beginning of Discipleship emerge from the text.

18 While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 19 And he said to them, "**Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.**" 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

21 And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them [to follow Him]. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Now, let's bring a little more clarity and detail to that image of these young men dropping everything they are doing, and "Following Jesus."

Quote

Looking at these verses, R.T. France wrote in his commentary on Matthew, "It is significant that Jesus' first recorded action is to gather a group of followers, who will commit themselves to a total change of lifestyle which involves them joining Jesus for the whole period of his public ministry. From this point on we shall not read stories about Jesus alone, but stories about Jesus and his disciples. Wherever he goes they will go."

R. T. France, The Gospel of Matthew

Explanation

So you have an image in your mind from our text in Matthew 4 of Jesus, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, walking up to Peter, Andrew, James and John CALLING THEM TO "Follow Me".

Their response was IMMEDIATE. So, let's add that detail to our image of what "Following Jesus looks like--Immediately; they dropped what they are doing and followed after Jesus. In an instant, their priorities of life changed.

And throughout the Gospels--Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John--everything Jesus said or did, we know the disciples were with him (even if they are not mentioned). Our image of a Christ Follower is becoming clearer.

But as you build your mental image of a Disciple, let me call your attention to one of the most important and overlooked details in our text. It's in verse 19: And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

"I WILL MAKE" (a DIVINE ACT)

Just like us, these very first disciples understood the words Jesus spoke, but how exactly they were to become "fishers of men" of course, they had no idea . . . not on day 1.

"I will make you fishers of men." Jesus said "I will do this."

JUST AS OUR SALVATION is DIVINE ACT, becoming "FISHERS OF MEN (or to use the language of the Great Commission in Matthew 28), becoming DISCIPLE-MAKERS is a DIVINE ACT. "I" . . . "I and no other will make you fishers of men."

That's precisely the word JESUS uses here. In the GREEK myths and dramas that were popular in the culture of the Bible, the word "MAKE" (the very one that Jesus uses) is a word reserved for a god creates something.

In the GREEK Old Testament--the OT that Jesus and everyone else in Jewish culture used--it's the word reserved for YHWH GOD making or creating something.

3,200 times in the Greek Old Testament, the divine act of calling something into existence is used to describe God's action and it's the same word Jesus uses here in v. 19 when he says, "I will MAKE you fishers of men."

THIS IS THE JESUS PURPOSE OF CALLING THESE FIRST DISCIPLES TO "FOLLOW ME" = "FOLLOW ME" and you will be made into Disciple-Makers.

This is NO LESS true for us. The PURPOSE OF OUR CALL TO FOLLOW CHRIST--as His disciples--is to be FISHERS OF MEN.

MATTHEW 28:19-20 The Great Commission, leaves no doubt about this.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

So, JESUS' ultimate purpose for you and me is to "MAKE DISCIPLES" BUT . . . just like Peter, Andrew, James, and John // and just like all other Disciples who Make Disciples throughout the history of the Church, we must "FOLLOW JESUS" first, be DISCIPLED FIRST.

AND it all begins with understanding what it means when Jesus calls us to "FOLLOW HIM."

The word Matthew uses here and elsewhere is ἀκολουθεῖν and we translate it as "follow me"

[Slide:] "Follow Me" (a-kol-ou-thane) "Used in the New Testament, it signifies a commitment that breaks all other ties in one's life."

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POINT #1 "THE CALL TO FOLLOW"

ἀκολουθεῖν

The word Matthew uses here and elsewhere is ἀκολουθεῖν and we translate it as "follow me"

[Slide:] "Follow Me" (a-kol-ou-thane) "Used in the New Testament, it signifies a commitment that breaks all other ties in one's life."

Think about that a moment. [REPEAT]

ἀκολουθεῖν was a very common word in the world of the New Testament describing the action a pupil "following" **his Rabbi or teacher in order to receive instruction.**

Application

Apply this point to your audience.

Illustration

FOLLOWING JESUS IS LIKE A STUDENT - TEACHER

One of the hallmarks of a good educator is to create lifelong learners. A first grade teacher is not going to be able to help every student in her class learn to read Dostoyevsky, or do trigonometry, or understand the intricacies of an atom, but they can help every student stay curious. They can teach the basics of reading. They can help children learn to add and subtract. Just as we don't expect a single interaction with a teacher to educate a child for their entire lives.

That's a good description of the thousands of disciples who initially followed Jesus around. To listen. To learn. THE WORDS OF GOD spoken to the people BY GOD HIMSELF.

JOHN 7:45-46 The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring [Jesus]?" The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!"

Listening to Jesus teachings and learning from Him is what Followers of Jesus do, but JUST LISTENING and LEARNING is not enough by itself. JESUS DEMANDS MORE.

JESUS DEMANDS MORE from HIS DISCIPLES: When Jesus calls His disciples and says "FOLLOW ME" it is a call to deeper commitment than following after HIS TEACHING only; He is demanding a deeper commitment.

2

POINT #2 "THE COST TO FOLLOW"

Bible Passage

Matthew 19:20-22 "Follow Me"

20 The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" 21 Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." 22 When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

EXPLANATION

EXPLANATION BEING REWORKED

Explanation: THREAT ASSESSMENT

R. T. France said that, "The would-be disciples' astonishment arises from the common assumption in the JEWISH WORLDVIEW that wealth is a sign of God's blessing and His reward for faithful service, so that when Jesus instead declares it to be an impediment to salvation he is undermining a fundamental part of their religious worldview."

HOW TRUE FOR us today? [expand]

Jesus' additional demand placed on "The rich young ruler" is not because of wealth, but that the young man's wealth was a threat to himself. There is a commitment that the YOUNG MAN has to his wealth; he obviously was a prime candidate for being a disciple, but his commitment to his wealth was a tie that he could not break away from to FOLLOW JESUS.

Matthew has already included in Chapter 6 (vv19–24) a powerful section of JESUS teaching on the incompatibility of earthly and heavenly treasure, with the concluding maxim that "you cannot be slaves of both God and wealth." No other priority we try to make equal to "FOLLOWING JESUS" is going to be compatible.

AND HOW HARD THIS IS . . .

Application

APPLICATION BEING REWORKED

Conclusion

HOW IS YOUR PICTURE OF A DISCIPLE LOOKING NOW?

Illustration

Imagine that your neighbor is always having trouble with his new automobile. Sometimes, he can't get it started, or it starts but only runs in fits and starts!

You tell your neighbor that it's obvious he has purchased a lemon. And you might be right.

But then, you learn that your neighbor has been adding a quart of water to his gasoline every now and then!

You wouldn't blame the NEW CAR or its maker for not starting or for running in fits and starts. The car was not built to work under those conditions. **After repair work on the**

car itself and better instructions given to your neighbor, his NEW CAR should begin to function and run as intended.

This illustration is from one of the great thinkers on Discipleship, Dallas Willard.

Maybe for many of you this morning, the abundant life of following Jesus and growing in Christ's love has been happening in fits and starts or maybe, growth is even completely stalled.

Dale Losch, wrote a great book, the title is **A Better Way and there must be a better way for people, that a disciple is** marked by love. He loves God and he loves people. A disciple is also marked by sacrifice—laying down his life and dying to self. And if this isn't happening (stalled) or happening only now and then, we need to help one another form a clear picture of Discipleship and help one another move forward and position themselves for abundant growth in being an authentic disciple of Christ.

CLOSING COMMENT AND POINT TO NEXT WEEK.