

FISHING: The Savior's Call to His Servants

Mark 1:14-20

In March of 2013, it was called simply *The Bible* – a television mini-series based on the Scriptures – found air-time on the History channel. It would be later released to theaters as a feature film under the title *Son of God*.

In one of the miniseries' segments, a compelling one minute, fifty-six second episode unfolds, quietly. Jesus is in Peter's boat urging him to keep fishing after a frustrating, no-catch night. "There aren't any fish here," he remarks to Jesus, with an obvious measure of irritation. Peter obediently throws the net into the glass-like water, and then suddenly, quite unexpectedly, the net bulges with an abundance of fish. Peter pulls it up, empties them into the boat, and throws the net out once more. Again the catch is abundant. With great effort he hoists it up, empties all into the boat. Time after time the net is thrown.

Finally, with all his catch-baskets full, Peter slumps back against the mast breathing heavily. He turns, looks up at Jesus, and asks, "How did this happen? What did you do?"

Jesus responds, "I'm giving you the chance to change your life." He moves closer to Peter. Eyes lock. "Peter, come with me. Give up catching fish, and I will make you a fisher of men."

Peter replies, "What are we going to do?"

Jesus pauses briefly, looks up, then whispers firmly, "Change the world."

Every time I see that segment from *The Bible*, something stirs within me. Every time.

Especially now. Don't you wish you could change the world? Maybe not by yourself...but be a part of something where you could do your part -- along with others -- that would really make a difference? I just turned 67 this past week, and I can't remember a time in my lifetime when I've felt that so keenly. Sometimes, we hear all the political and cultural noise, and want simply to withdraw.

But we follow Jesus, And that's what He came to do. That's why God sent John the Baptizer out in front of him, crying in the wilderness that Someone truly great was coming, Someone who required I clear out my sin clutter, Someone who would plunge me into the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. Someone was coming, John insisted, who wanted to thoroughly change my life. My world. was coming

So what was his plan? After his own baptism and his own time of rigorous testing in the desert. What was his plan to change the world?

**To change the world, Jesus develops
followers into fishermen.**

Reading Mark's account alone, one might believe that this was the first time Jesus met these fishermen and invited them to follow Him. However, we know from the opening chapters of John's gospel tells us that at first, these men **came looking for Jesus**—at the encouragement of John the Baptist.ⁱ The baptizer pointed Andrew to Jesus. Andrew went and found Peter. They all went up north to Galilee. Jesus finds Philip, who after meeting Jesus, goes and grabs Nathanael. There's a cluster of men hanging out with Jesus,ⁱⁱ listening to him teach. They go to a wedding together, even see an amazing miracle. But, after their initial investigation several returned to their regular profession of fishing out of Bethsaida and Capernaum.

Now here in Mark's account, **Jesus comes looking for them**. And when they see him striding along the Galilee's shoreline, they know who he is. But it when he challenges them, they know what he is about.

So he calls out to them...he walks back into their life in the middle of their busy day to shout: **Follow me, I will make you become fishers of men**. "What you do with fish, I want to teach you to do with men." This the call goes beyond merely hanging with him and check him out, but the call to fish with Him. Not to fish for mindless fish, but to contend for the hearts and lives and souls of people. To speak truth and to bring love. The Lord is asking the men to leave their fishing businesses to become full-time apprentices in ministry. And his call is to **become** fishers of men, and in so becoming, join Jesus in changing the world.

How did Jesus "become" them. How did he change self-oriented businessmen into others-oriented *fishers of men*? May I set before you 3 observations? First, When Jesus reentered the lives of these disciples...

First Observation - FISHING IS JESUS' PRIORITY

He sets before us the priority of fishing for people

Mark 1:14-17

^{Mark 1:14-17} 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."

William Lane helps us understand

Jesus' word to Simon and Andrew was remembered for its vividness and urgency: "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." To interpret this phrase only as a play on words appropriate to the situation (Jesus called to them as they were fishing) is to fail to appreciate its biblical background. **In the OT prophetic tradition it is God who is the fisher of men.** The fishing metaphor...is striking...as when the Legitimate Teacher expresses his awareness of being commissioned to execute God's fishing among his contemporaries.

The summons to be fishers of men is a call to the task of gathering men in view of the forthcoming judgment of God. In specifically calling these men to be fishers, there is reflection on the unpreparedness of people for the critical moment which has come. In time the fishers will go where Jesus has not gone and they themselves will proclaim the message by which men are gathered.

Jesus affirms his relationship to those called: *He will make them become fishers of men. What they will become depends upon their following him.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Let's wonder with the Holy Spirit about this idea for a moment. Suppose someone were to ask you tomorrow at lunch, "Are you a Christian? Are you a follower of Jesus?" We might be pleasantly surprised at the question, and reply, "*Why yes, I am a Christian. I've been following Jesus for 2 years...(or) Ten years...(or) Twenty five years.*"

"Really," your friend responds. "OK, let me ask you this. What does a follower of Jesus do?" he asks. "I mean, what happens in your life *because* you are following Jesus?" Now there's a question! What first response comes into your mind? Well, perhaps all kinds of things:

- trying to follow the 10 commandments
- want to become more holy or prayerful or loving or honest
- hoping to be a better father or mother
- trying to deal with some personal habits I know are displeasing to God

All those things are important, to be sure:

- I read the Bible
- I attend worship services on the day the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead
- I wear a cross around my neck
- I GATHER-CONNECT-SERVE at Christ Community Church...I'm in a connect group!
- I used to have a WWJD bracelet
- I pray before I eat
- I've cleaned up my language
- I've stopped watching filthy media and movies that compromise my holiness

All that...well and good! And yet as I read this portion of God's Word, I'm struck by the simplicity of what must have been in those men's minds as they left the boats and nets.

Bottom line – “If I leave this and follow Him, He has a PRIORITY. The major thing He is going to teach me *to become someone who is engaged in fishing. To regularly catch the hearts and lives and souls of people for the kingdom of God. To fish...for people.* If I follow Him, that is what will happen. That is what a follower of Jesus, a servant like Jesus, does.”

Why would I conclude that? Because to change the world, Jesus develops followers into fishermen by prioritizing fishing. That’s the first observation.

Second Observation – FISHING TAKES TEAMWORK

Preparing, casting, drawing in fish --Mark 1:16,19

“He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea (1:16)...

*He saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending their nets. (1:19).
They left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him (1:20)”*

Fishing involved working together with large nets. Here’s what I dug up about this:

The strenuous life of fisherman required a strong physique (Luke 5:2)...at least seven of Jesus’ disciples were (originally) fisherman^{iv}...Some of these were partners in fishing and were used to working together.

Often on the Sea of Galilee fishing was done at night (Luke 5:5, John 21:3). During the day the fisherman on the shore or wading in the water could throw the casting net (Matthew 4:18). Larger nets were let down by several men from boats (Luke 5:4). The fish were either emptied into the boat (Luke 5:7) or the nets were dragged to shore (Matthew 13:48, John 21:8). The Bible does not refer to fishing as recreation.^v ☺

Here’s a bit more:

In the NT three Greek words are translated “net”...the most common word (δικτυα) [was] the type of net used by Jesus disciples. It was let down, or cast, into the water, and [then drawn in and] emptied into a boat, or dragged to shore...the care of nets included washing (Luke 5:2), drying (Ezekiel 47:10) and mending (Matthew 4:21).^{vi}

Several things stand out here. One is that **fishing generally was not a solo activity.** Oh sure, you could grab one of the smaller circular hand nets with weights on the edges and cast it into the water from the shallow water and draw it in. But most of the time, fishing was a group effort—people working together and in sync. It took a team of people to go and cast nets and bring in a sufficient catch.

Another idea is that **the care and condition of the nets was critical.** If fish were to be caught, the nets had to be clean, the mesh needed to be untornd, the net to have what we might call “integrity” (no gaping holes). The net, when in proper shape, was an effective way of catching fish. So it took

some time to look at the equipment (the approaches, if you will) which was going to be used for fishing.

And, **successful fishing required going where the schools of fish were.** Fisherman had to figure out where the catch was and go there and do the work together if there was to be any success.

“Follow me,” Jesus calls. There’s fishing we need to do **together.** To cast out some nets where lost people are, an approach we’ve prepared for effective use, and we need to go where the fish are swimming (if you will)

The first value Jesus plants in their minds is the **priority** of fishing for men.
Second, fishing involves a **team effort** in preparing, casting, and drawing in nets.

Here’s a third observation.

THIRD OBSERVATION – FISHING IS SERVANT DEVELOPMENT

Jesus’ plan was to engage disciples in actively
to lost, hurting, wandering people
Mark 1:21-39

Immediately following the Lord’s call to these men, Mark records these things happening:

- Jesus enters the Capernaum synagogue and begins teach (1:21-22)
- He casts an unclean spirit out of a man whose life was wracked around with evil (1:24-26)
- Jesus cures Peter’s mother-in-law who was bed-ridden with a high fever (1:31)
- An entire city gathers for ministry until late into the evening (1:32-34)
- Before daybreak, Jesus is up praying (1:35)
- As his disciples search for Him, He insists “Let’s go somewhere else to the towns nearby...for that is what I came out for.” (1:37).

Dan Spader makes some interesting remarks about this in his book *Growing a Healthy Church*.

Allow Mark to give you a feel for the outreach during this phase (1:14-2:12). Soon after Jesus chose the first five team members, He traveled to Capernaum and got down to business. He began preaching to the crowds in the synagogue. He drove a demon from a man. In Peter’s home, after Jesus healed Peter’s mother in law, Mark says the whole town gathered at the door. The response was phenomenal...

At this point Jesus teaches his disciples an important lesson. It is not enough to have great response from a few. People are lost and in need of the Savior in other places as well. Refusing to be influenced by the clamor of the crowd, Jesus left Capernaum and took his followers throughout Galilee. First and foremost, Jesus was working to reach the masses, passionately burdened for the lost.

His second purpose was to model the process and involve His ministry team in outreach. He wanted His disciples to share His passion...He knew the result in their lives would be both deep joy as well as lifelong conviction and commitment to Great Commission living.

Do you notice any difference at this point from the usual methodology in our own churches. Frequently, we aim the majority of our efforts at Christians. Then we turn around and plead with people to share the gospel with their non-Christian acquaintances. But the average believer needs help in reaching out to

others. Christ knew that. By taking along the men being trained for ministry, he was giving them an example to follow.^{vii}

When we say to our Heavenly Father, “Lord God, we want to follow Jesus more closely,” that must mean we never lose sight of how much lost people matter to God. When we take His call to follow Him, it means giving time and effort and prayer and heart/soul to learn to fish.

In his own journal, responding to these verses in Mark 1, Charles Spurgeon wrote: “Lord, as a winner of souls cause me to imitate thy spirit and method, that I may not labor in vain...Lord cause me to be thy unhesitating and faithful follower as long as I live.”^{viii}

FISHING IS OUR LORD'S PRIORITY
FISHING IS A TEAM EFFORT
FISHING IS HOW JESUS DEVELOPS ME AS A SERVANT

SO NOW WHAT? First, let's admit that some of us – perhaps many of us – have already heard teaching like this and said in our hearts and with our actions, “No way. I don't do fishing.” Not surprisingly, we've been honest with researchers when we've been surveyed. The Barna group^{ix} tells us this about us:

#1 **IN THEORY-YES!:** most all practicing Christians (95-97%) say **that part of their faith is being a witness** about Jesus. And just about the same percentage (94-97%) say that the best thing that could ever happen to someone is for them to know Jesus. And even 75% of Millennials (ages 23-38) feel equipped to share their faith...that they are even gifted at sharing their faith with others.

#2 **NOT REALLY WILLING:** However, we also tell researchers that while we are ready, **we are not really willing**. A whole lot of us (almost 50% of Millennials) believe it is wrong, or at least rude to share one's personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes they will one day share the same faith.

#3 **STEERING CLEAR:** But more and more, two words describe what we do when urged to “fish” – **avoidance and ambivalence**. **AVOIDANCE** – because sharing faith creates tension and arguments. **AMBIVALENCE** – because I don't care about discussing this, and I don't know enough to talk intelligently or helpfully.

#4 **REPUTATION:** we have little interest in **being categorized** as extreme, or a fanatic, or a bigot. And we figure that if we share our faith, we will be put in “that box.”

Do you think that is what Jesus meant by becoming a “fisher of men”? Not from what I can read. I read Mark's account, the other gospel accounts as well, and I find Jesus and his disciples intentionally going *toward* people with both simple truth about life and with loving, relationship building

actions. (repeat that!) The frame Jesus had was this – “This is how I serve the true need in a person’s life. They’re lost. They must know that the kingdom of God is available. I must lovingly step into their lives. To get closer. When they are ready, to speak simple truth. To help and love.”

So...let me ask you to **CHOOSE GREATNESS**, to **SERVE** by doing this.

First, **honestly talk to the Lord Jesus** about this in your own following of Him. Talk with him about whether or not fishing is a priority in your following. Not ever merely “Well, the pastor guilted me into sharing my faith.” No, rather, “Jesus said to me *Follow...I’ll make you a fisher of men.*”

Second, **start by prayerfully assessing your nets, your equipment.** Might the Holy Spirit identify a way for you to love and reach someone through a relationship, through some time and interest you might show to someone outside God’s family right now. Who is in the routine of life that you know that the best thing that could ever happen to someone is for them to know Jesus.

Third, **talk and pray with others about fishing together.** Your spouse, your kids, your connect group members. I mean, what part of your world could Jesus change if someday, someone in heaven said,

- I’m so thankful that that couple from Christ Community Church knocked on our door after we moved into the neighborhood and were genuinely interested in helping us get settled in Gilbert
- I’m so thankful that when I was working at ---- that Jim from Christ Community Church wanted to grab lunch together once a week.
- I’m so thankful that Mary began praying for me way before I ever knew it. I can remember that first time she said, “Let’s meet for coffee this afternoon.”
- I’m so thankful that Caleb and his friends invited me to that Bible study in our dorm
- I’m so thankful that Rich and Linda had us over and asked us about what it meant to be a person of color in this community...and really cared about our experience.
- I’m so thankful that Rob wanted to coach an Upward basketball team and invited me to help even when I couldn’t have cared less about Christ...at first.
- I’m so thankful that that Connect Group at Christ Community church decided not to be closed but open and invited us in (even when we weren’t Christians, and we did a discussion Bible study that helped us explore our objections to Christianity
- I’m so thankful...(you write the line)

What could you do *together* to intentionally build a trusting relationship, to help someone, some family, some colleagues, who are lost, and build a friendship?

**To change the world, Jesus develops
us together into fishermen, with Him**

Get out of your own boat, and down the pathway with the Lord Himself. If you follow, it's pretty certain He knows where the lost are, and how to reach them.

CHOOSE GREATNESS PRINCIPLE

Jesus' servants, in following Him, fish for men.
The more they fish, the more they are following.

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ⁱ It may have been that Andrew and Peter had taken a trip south to Judea (or Jerusalem) for some reason, and Andrew went out to hear John the baptizer at the Jordan. John's account seems to stage their initial interest down in Judea, before returning up to Galilee (cf. John 1:35-51).

ⁱⁱ What Bill Hull as called the "Come and See" stage, cf. *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker*.

ⁱⁱⁱ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Eerdmans, 1974), 67-70.

^{iv} Peter, Andrew, probably Philip, who also came from Bethsaida (Aramaic for 'house of fishing') on the Sea of Galilee, James, John, Thomas, and Nathanael (Matthew 4:18, 21, John 1:44, 21:2).

^v J.A. Thompson, "Fish, Fishing" in J.D. Douglas, Organizing Editor, *The New Bible Dictionary* (Eerdmans, 1962), 424.

^{vi} Ibid., "Nets", 879

^{vii} Dan Spader and Gary Mayes, *Growing a Healthy Church* (Moody Press, 1991), 39-41.

^{viii} From Spurgeon's commentary on Matthew 4:18-21.

^{ix} <https://www.barna.com/research/reasons-for-reluctance/> and <https://www.barna.com/research/millennials-oppose-evangelism/>