

1.8.12 Series: The Urgent Gospel of Mark

Title: The Call

Text: Mark 1:14-20, 2:13-17

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 the nets. 20 And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

13 He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. 14 And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

15 And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. 16 And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 17 And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

summary

We see the urgency of Jesus' call on his disciples. First, with the fishermen. Then, with Levi the tax collector. Jesus tells the fishermen that he is going to make them "fishers of men", but when we see Jesus calling Levi, we get a fuller picture of what those "men" are going to look like. Were the disciples taken aback by the "type" of fish that Jesus wanted to catch? Are we? Or, better yet, have we even started fishing?

my story

Pastor Jeremy began his message with these two questions, "If a fisherman has never caught fish, what does it say about him? If we are called to be 'fishers of men' but haven't caught any men, what does it say about us?" That is a sobering thought. Does being a "fisher of men" seem more like a cute Sunday School song than a calling? If that's true for you, how do you move past that? Is there a way to rephrase the expression so that the meaning would be conveyed through an analogy that is more relevant for you?

segue

When Jesus begins his ministry, he is traveling throughout Galilee preaching the "gospel of God". Is this different than the gospel that we are called to share?

The word *Gospel*, is derived from the Greek word literally meaning "good news", or as Tim Keller describes it, "news that brings joy." He writes a rather insightful description of its usage in "King's Cross":

This word had currency when Mark used it, but it wasn't religious currency. It meant history-making, life-shaping news, as opposed to just daily news... A gospel was news of some event that changed things in a meaningful way... A gospel is an announcement of something that has happened in history, something that's been done for you that changes your status forever. [1]

We are called, then, to be heralds of this joyful news because Jesus' death and resurrection has forever changed our status before our Creator God. This is no ordinary news; it is monumental! Do we really get that? Do we fully grasp how life-changing the news of Christ is, or do we take it for granted? If we really believed that this news could change peoples lives, this should bring us great joy. The kind of joy that we'd be eager to share with those around us.

God's story

1. How he calls: The word *immediately* is used 41 times in Mark and 2 times in this passage. Take a few moments to review the events of Luke 4:14-44, and John 1:35-42. Peter, James and John had had interactions with Jesus before he called them to be his disciples. Andrew had originally been a disciple of John and heard John commend Jesus as the "Lamb of God".

When Jesus calls those first disciples, their decision to follow him is based on reasons of previous experiences. It's authoritative and urgent, but it isn't the blind faith that we are used to attributing to their eager obedience - their "great spiritual faith". If those first disciples left everything to follow a man that they already had previous experiences with, how might that affect the way you view the call of God in your life? How might that affect the way you go about sharing the Gospel with others?

2. Who he calls: We tend to think of those first disciples as "poor fishermen", but in reality they were working men who were most likely successful in their industry (note the hired servants in vs. 20). Pastor Jeremy mentioned that it is often thought poor people rely on Jesus as either a crutch or a bludgeoning tool. How does this passage refute that common notion? Can you think of other passages that affirm that the Gospel is for everyone?

3. What he calls them to do: Read Matthew 28:16-20, otherwise known as The Great Commission. The disciples who were fishermen understood instinctively that the "fish" weren't going to come to them; rather, they needed to "go" out and find the fish/men. This required action on their part, just as God actively seeks us. Remember that an apostle is literally a "sent one". How do we see this idea of "sending" demonstrated in the Trinity? What does this say about God?

4. Who he calls them to: According to N.T. Wright, "The last town you'd go through travelling east from Antipas's land into Philip's, or the first you'd come to going west into Galilee, was Capernaum. Just as today you often have to pay a toll for the privilege of crossing a border,...so you had to pay a toll to cross from one part of the old kingdom into another." [2] So Levi, the tax collector, is most likely sitting in a tax booth along the sea where Peter, Andrew, James and John were fishing. This is remarkable because not only does Jesus call the fishermen, but he calls the tax collector that everyone despises. He doesn't just call the guy underwater on his mortgage, he calls the banker as well. (Note in this passage that Levi is most likely working for Herod, a man who considered himself the King of the Jews, and now he is

being called by the real King of the Jews.)

These religious leaders did not understand the heart of God; he came to call sinners, the sick who needed healing. Why would this young, popular teacher “risk his career” by associating with the dregs of society? Surely this is the thought going through the minds of those leaders who were present at Levi’s house. Could you associate with the dregs of society? What’s the difference between religion and gospel? When people think of Christianity, which of the two do you think they consider it to be? Be honest, have you ever avoided people who needed to know the Gospel because you didn’t want to be associated with them or their lifestyle? Were you afraid their “filth” may rub off on you?

my place in God’s story

1. The call of Jesus is more urgent and authoritative than anything else in your life. It’s a radical call that redefines your goals. Often when we talk about radical calls, we think of fanaticism. Pastor Rob Bell refers to this type of person as “bullhorn guy”, the guy standing on the street with a bullhorn proclaiming the Gospel randomly to anyone within earshot. Thankfully, we aren’t all called to carry around bullhorns, but Jesus *does* call us to live radically in a way that shows evidence of His presence in our lives. What’s the difference between following Jesus with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and being a fanatic? Are they synonymous? If you were to follow Jesus’ call with urgency, what goals might you need to redefine?

2. Our problem might be that we don’t “get” the urgency, but the real problem is probably that we don’t like the kind of fish that God calls us to catch. Is that you? What keeps you from telling more people about Jesus? What are the challenges for you in this area? Are there other reasons that you don’t fish for men? What are they and how can you address them?

conclusion

Pastor Jeremy said that nine-tenths of fishing is proximity, so if you’re not at the lake, you’re never going to catch fish. Where is your lake/ pond? If you don’t have one, examine where this could be in your life. If you do have one, have you thrown down your net? Are there any obstacles to throwing down your net? We don’t have to be “bullhorn guy” to throw down our net, often this just means beginning to cultivate relationships with others where we may have an opportunity to one day share the Gospel with them. Jesus says, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” It is Jesus who ultimately calls people unto Himself, but with authority and urgency he calls us to join in his mission by throwing down our nets.

[1] Timothy Keller, *King’s Cross: the Story of the World in the Life of Jesus* (New York: Dutton, 2011), p.14-15.

[2] N. T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p.20.