

Fishing for Men

Scripture: Matthew 4:18–22

Code: 2195

Matthew, chapter 4. One of the most wonderful texts in all the Word of God because that great statement of our Lord is here, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Some years ago, I was reading *The Presbyterian Journal*, and I read this parable. I thought it was a fitting way to introduce our thoughts from Matthew 4 tonight. This is what it said: “On a dangerous sea coast where shipwrecks often occur, there was once a crude, little life-saving station. The building was just a hut, and there as only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves, went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Many lives were saved by this wonderful little life-saving station. So it became famous.”

“Some of those who were saved and various others in the surrounding area, wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and their money and their effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought, and new life-saving crews were trained, and the little life-saving station grew. Some of the members of the life-saving station were unhappy that the building was no crude and poorly equipped. They felt a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. So they replaced the emergency cots and beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building. Now the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they decorated it beautifully, and furnished it exquisitely because they used it as sort of a club.”

“Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work. The life-saving motif still prevailed in the club’s decorations, and there was a liturgical lifeboat in the room where the club held its initiations. About this time, a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in loads of cold, wet, half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick, and some of them had black skin and some had yellow skin.”

“The beautiful new club was considerably messed up. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where the victims of shipwrecks could be cleaned up before coming inside. At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club’s life-saving activities as being unpleasant, and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted upon life-saving as their primary purpose, and pointed out they were still called a life-saving station. But they were finally voted down and told if they wanted to save the lives of various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own life-saving station down the coast a little ways, which they did.”

“As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old one. It evolved into a club, and yet another life-saving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that coast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown.”

What a simple and striking illustration of the history of the church. But the work of life-saving and the work of evangelism is nonetheless, the purest and the truest and the noblest and the most essential work the church will ever do. The work of evangelism, the work of fishing men, as it were, out of the sea of sin. The work of rescuing people from the breakers of hell is the greatest work the church will ever do. It is God's great concern. First John 4 tells us, "We love Him only because He first loved us." John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that He gave." The greatest work in the heart of God, the greatest concern in the mind of God is evangelism. Winning the lost is God's great concern. It is also Christ's great concern.

Luke 19:10 says, "For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." The work of winning the lost is God's concern and Christ's concern, and also the greatest concern of the Holy Spirit. For it is the Holy Spirit who comes, according to John 16, to convict men of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. It is the Holy Spirit who comes upon the church, and after we have received the Holy Spirit, we are made witnesses, Jesus said, "Unto me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth." The great concern of God is evangelism. The great concern of Christ is evangelism. The great concern of the Spirit is evangelism, saving the lost.

When you come into the New Testament, you find it also is the apostles' greatest concern. Certainly, it was true of Paul. In Romans chapter 1, Paul echoed what is a divine sentiment, "I am debtor to the Greeks and the Barbarians, to the wise and to the unwise, so as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Later on in that same wonderful epistle of Romans, Paul shared his heart in the ninth chapter by saying this, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." It was his great concern.

In chapter 10:1, he says, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved." In 1 Corinthians 9:20-22, he says, "I will become all things to all men that by some means I might win them to Christ." Listen, God's greatest concern is to win people to Himself; Christ's greatest concern, the Spirit's greatest concern, the greatest concern of the apostles, and it was the greatest concern of the early church. When they were scattered in Acts chapter 8, they went everywhere preaching Jesus Christ, endeavoring to win people to Him.

Even in the Old Testament, it was no different. In the Old Testament God's great heart was a concerned heart, and it was concerned for those that were lost. In fact, in Proverbs 11:30, we have this great statement, "He that winneth souls is," what? "is wise." If you know anything about the term "wise" in the book of Proverbs, you know that the term wise is a synonym really for righteous living. The truly righteous person, the person who really lives with understanding, the person who doesn't just know but lives it out, is the one who wins souls. He is truly wise.

At the end of the book of Daniel in the twelfth chapter and the third verse it says, "And they that be wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever." People who turn others to righteousness are wise, and they will shine as the stars forever and ever. I think that's the source of the name "Starlighter," one of our classes in our church. The Word of God is clear. Our text echoes the same sentiment; look at it. In Matthew chapter 4, the great word of our Lord Jesus Christ in verse 19, "And He saith unto them, 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.'" What a promise. He doesn't just say, "I want you to do it." He

says, "I'll make you into those who can."

This is our task. Did you know that the term "evangelize," the Greek term, is used no less than 53 times in the New Testament? It is all summarized, as it were, in the great commission in Matthew 28 when the Lord said, "Go into all the world," winning people to Christ and, "baptizing them, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

Someone has said, "Evangelism is the sob of God. Evangelism is the anguished cry of Jesus as He weeps over a doomed city. Evangelism is the cry of Paul when he says, as I read, 'I could wish myself were accursed from Christ for my brother, my kinsman according to the flesh.' Evangelism is the heart-winning plea of Moses, who said, 'Oh these people have sinned, yet now if Thou wilt forgive their sin—if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of the book, which Thou has written.' Evangelism is the cry of John Knox, who said, 'Give me Scotland or I die.' It is the cry of Wesley who said, 'The world is my parish.' Evangelism is the sob of parents in the night weeping over a lost son."

This is the greatest task, and we must be about this task. At the same time, evangelism is a great paradox. Winning people to Jesus Christ is paradoxical in this sense; Jesus said, "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it, but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake the same shall save it." In other words in saving others, we lose ourselves; or in losing ourselves in the task, we will win others. In fact, we might put it this way; the one who would win the world must be rejected by the world. You can't have both.

In John chapter 15, Jesus said this, verse 25, "This cometh to pass that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law. They hated me without a cause, but when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He shall testify of me and ye also shall bear witness." In other words, Jesus says, "You're going to be my witnesses. You're going to go into the world and bear witness." What's going to happen? Verse 2 of chapter 16, "They shall put you out of the synagogues: Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." He, who would win the world, he who would reach the world, must be rejected by the world. He, who would save his life, must lose it. He, who loses his life, will find it used to save others. This is Jesus' way. Our Lord, who saves us from death by conquering death, had to yield to death.

So evangelism, in a sense, is the sacrifice of the greater for the lesser. It is the worthy for the unworthy. It is the strong dying that the weak may live. It is not the loveless theory of the survival of the fittest, but is the sacrifice of the fittest that the feeblest may walk. The Bible is clear that we must be committed to this; that we must be committed to face the world of people without Jesus Christ and lose ourselves that we may win them.

I was rummaging through an old book this week, and I like to do that because I find that all of the things that we think are so new and so wonderful and just discovered by this generation of alert Christians, are always buried in some treasure of the past. God's Holy Spirit has always disclosed these great truths to all His people through all the years. I was rummaging through an old book written in 1877. I found this little note here, and I thought it was interesting. The writer was trying to incite people to evangelize. This old man of God, whoever he was - and it was anonymous, no doubt some preacher - was trying in an impassioned plea to get people to go out and win others to Christ. He was probably saying to the church, "Be a lifesaving crew, not a club." These were his words, and I thought they were so interesting.

“If we were supposed the present population of our globe to be 16 hundred million,” which would be 1.6 billion in 1877, “which is probably an overestimate, and that in all that vast number, there was but one true Christian. And that he should be instrumental in the hands of the blessed Spirit during the coming year of the conversion of only two others to Christ; and that each of those two new converts should be instrumentally used to lead two others to Christ during their first year of spiritual life. And that the work should thus continue each new convert leading two others to Christ within a year of his conversion, how long would it take at this rate starting from one Christian to bring the whole 16 hundred million to Christ? The answer will doubtless startle many of our readers, but if we may rely on figures, the whole world would be converted in a little less than 30 and a half years, within less than a single generation.”

“Is such a work too mighty for God’s Spirit to accomplish, or for the church to strive to achieve? But let us vary somewhat the conditions. Instead of supposing, as above, that there was but one true Christian in all the world, let us with a nearer approximation to the truth suppose the number to be at least 20 million. This is probably much below the truth. If each one of these 20 million Christians should bring to Christ one single soul within the coming year, the whole number would be doubled before the end of this year, 1877. If similar blessed results should follow prayer and effort in 1878, and be continued year after year, each true Christian becoming instrumental by prayer and personal effort in the salvation of only one soul a year, long before 1883, would have come to a close. The grand chorus would be heard in heaven, the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.”

You want to know something? They didn’t do it. Did you know that? That’s right. They didn’t do it. You want hear something interesting? If one person at Grace Community Church trained two other people how to present Jesus Christ, and they each led one person to Christ; and this process continued every six months, in six and a half years the entire San Fernando Valley would be converted to Christ, and the rest of Los Angeles in the last six months. Now, the reason why I say that is not to get into an argument about whether God wants the whole city of Los Angeles saved or not, but simply to show you that it is not an impossibility. The commission hasn’t changed. It’s got to start somewhere, people. It can start with us.

It’s got to start right where you are; not up here. A stationary foghorn has its value, but nobody ever got rescued out of the sea by a stationary foghorn. I can come in here Sunday after Sunday and honk and blow the whistle, but it’s going to take well-trained, life-saving crews who are out there picking the souls out of the sea, who are being fishers of men.

Henry Ward Beecher, great preacher, said this: “The longer I live, the more confidence I have in those sermons preached in which one man is the minister and one man is the congregation, where there is no question as to whom is meant when the preacher says, ‘Thou art the man.’” Evangelism is the realization in time of God’s eternal redemptive purpose. Personal evangelism, winning people to Jesus Christ. Beloved, it all began in Matthew 4:18-22. Let’s look at it.

“And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And He saith unto them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fisher of men.’ And they straightway left their nets, and followed Him. And going on from there, he saw two other brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a boat with Zebedee, their father, mending their nets; and He called them. And they immediately left the

boat and their father, and followed Him.”

This was the first life-saving crew ever gathered in the New Testament, the first band to be trained for evangelism to start the process to fulfill the great commission. It all began here. Now let's look at the context again. Matthew is introducing us to the King, King Jesus. That's his theme all through 28 chapters of his gospel, and everywhere in this gospel we're going to meet the royalty of Jesus Christ. We're going to see Him as King. I've been telling you that in Matthew 4:12-25, this whole big section here is really one unit. In Matthew 4:12-25, he concentrates on the official ministry of the King. This is where Christ's official kingly ministry begins, and we called it "The Light Dawns."

Finally, the King arrives. After all the years of preparation, after the ministry of John the Baptist, after the baptism, after the temptation, finally Jesus embarks on His official ministry. The light dawns in Galilee. Everything is in perfect order. Everything is ready.

As Jesus' ministry begins, you'll remember our outline. It's in the bulletin if you need to refresh your mind. He begins His ministry right here in verse 12 to 25, and we've given you several points to consider. First of all, in verse 12 we saw He began His ministry at the right point, at the right point. Secondly, in verses 13 to 16, in the right place in Galilee. Thirdly, by the right proclamation. You remember that in verse 17? "From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

Listen, Jesus was on a divine clock, a divine calendar, functioning in response to God's plan. He began His ministry at the right point when John was cast into prison; in the right place in Galilee of the Gentiles where He would have the greatest hearing, where there was the most openness, the most potential, and the greatest need; and by the right proclamation. There was a kingdom coming, but somebody had to be converted to participate in it.

God had a kingdom, Jesus said, and if you want to be a part you've got to repent and be converted.

So, He began at the right point, in the right place, by the right proclamation and – now, we come to verse 18 - with the right partners, with the right partners. Jesus never intended to do it alone. He never did. Oh, He could have. Sure, He could. He had the power. He had the right, but it wasn't the plan. He never intended to do it alone. Mark this one, He also never intended to do it just with preaching. There was to be fishing for men.

Dr. Duryea said many years ago, "The sick soul needs more than a lecture on medicine. He needs a personal prescription." Jesus needed some people to go beyond the lecture on medicine that He would give, and take the personal prescription to the souls of the people they would meet. We don't know how all twelve disciples were called to start that first life-saving crew, but we do know that they were all called personally by Jesus Christ. We know the circumstances around seven of them. The other five, we don't know the specifics, but we know that Jesus called them Himself. He picked out His crew. He picked out the individuals that He wanted to go out to be a part of this marvelous opportunity of fishing for men. Listen, God always chooses His partners carefully.

You can look all the way back in the Old Testament, and you can read with great wonder how God chose Israel to be His partners in evangelizing the world. They were to be the ones who were to be His mouthpiece. In Isaiah 49, He says, "Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." He chose the Jewish people to be His partners in the Old Testament. Then He chose from among them some special people like Jeremiah and Isaiah and Ezekiel and many, many more. When we come to the New Testament, Jesus chose His partners just as carefully. In John 15:16, Jesus

looked those twelve in the face and He said, "You have not chosen me, but," what? "I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go forth and bear fruit." You didn't choose me; I chose you. Jesus chose His partners very carefully.

In John 6:70, "Have not I chosen you twelve?" He said. John 13:18, "I know whom I have chosen." Luke 6:13, same truth, "And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples, and of them He chose twelve." When Jesus chooses His partners, He chooses very carefully. You say, "Boy, do you think He's chosen me to be a fisher of men?" Oh yes. Everybody in Christ has that commission. We're all to be witnesses. We're all to preach Christ. We're all to speak of Christ. We're all to labor in the fields that are white unto harvest, all of us. You see it in the book of Acts, as it unfolds all the way through, as the church expands and grows and everybody becomes a part of the life-saving crew.

So, to the prophets of the Old Testament, to the apostles and disciples of the New, is added everybody whoever came to Jesus Christ. It's all our task. In Luke 24:46, "He said unto them, thus it is written and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day," now watch, "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations beginning at Jerusalem, and ye are witnesses of these things."

Do you notice that repentance and remission of sins were to be preached in His name among all nations, and it was only the beginning at Jerusalem? It's to go way beyond that. We're all a part of that continuity. That's why in Acts 1:8, it went a step further, "And after the Holy Spirit has come upon you, ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, in Judea and in Samaria." That's why in 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul says, "And we are to be ambassadors for God beseeching men to come to Christ." Peter echoed the same refrain in 1 Peter 2:9, "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His name, that you should show forth His praises." It started with the twelve. It extended to the early church in Jerusalem and then to Judea, then to Samaria, then to the world and to us. This is our work. We, too, are to follow Jesus and be fishers of men.

I think that it's a strong word for us here at Grace, because I think this is a time in the life of Grace Church when we really need to emphasize this. Somebody said to me the other day, "Why does it seem that you're emphasizing evangelism right now? You're emphasizing kind of a new depth and dimension in the spiritual life?" I said, "Well, really it's for me I'm caught up in the flow of what Christ is doing here." I don't calculate all these things. I don't sit down and say, "Well, now, let's see. I ought to do this and do this. I ought to emphasize this and this." To a degree, you have to do that, but I find that this is Christ's church. He's building it, and I'm caught in the flow of it. Sometimes I don't even know what's going on until somebody evaluates it for me. They'll say, "Did you notice that you're talking a lot about evangelism lately?" Oh? I guess I am. That's the adventure of being a part of what the Spirit of God is doing.

It isn't me that's driving it in a direction. I'm just moving with it, trusting that God is leading. I think this is the time for Grace Church to look at the subject of evangelism. We've had the great fellowship. We've learned the great truths. We could become so absorbed in our wonderful riches that we forget all about the lost people. We could be so busy singing our own music, that we forget that they need to hear the song too. We could like it so much here that we forget about out there.

Once there was a man named Luigi Tarisio. Luigi Tarisio was found dead one morning in his house without scarcely a comfort in the entire place. But stashed away in Luigi's house, get this, were 246

exquisite violins, which he had been collecting all his life and crammed into his attic; the best of which were in the bottom drawer of a rickety old bureau. Luigi, in his great devotion to the violin, had robbed the world of all of its music. All the time he treasured the violins, the world never heard their song. Others before him had done the same. Do you know that the greatest Stradivarius violin ever made was first played when it was 147 years old, because somebody stashed it away?

I wonder how many Christians are like old Luigi Tarisio? In your very love for the church, in your very love for the treasures of the Word of God, you get absorbed and the world never hears their music. Tragic.

Somebody told me a statistic that I don't want to believe. Ninety-five percent of all Christians have never led anybody to Jesus Christ. Ninety-five percent of all the world's great spiritual violins have never played. You can hold on to the things you love in the church, but you've got to reach out too.

I love the story Moody used to tell. He said he was visiting a Chicago art gallery, and he stood before a painting entitled what Ruth has played for us tonight, "Rock of Ages." The picture showed a person with both hands clinging to a cross that was embedded in a rock. While a stormy sea smashed against the rock, he hung to the cross. Moody said, "I thought it was the most beautiful picture that I had ever seen. Years later," he said, "I saw a similar picture. This one showed a person in a storm holding a cross, but with one hand while he was reaching to a drowning man with the other." Moody said, "That was lovelier yet." We're rich at Grace Church. I hope we're not forgetful of those that desperately need what we possess.

In one of his books, S. D. Gordon pictures Gabriel as engaged in a dialogue with Christ shortly after the ascension. The angel is asking Christ about the plans for evangelism, and Jesus said, "Well I asked Peter and James and John and Andrew and a few others to make it the business of their lives to tell people. Then, those others would tell others, and finally the whole world would hear the story and feel the power of it." In the legend, Gabriel said, "But suppose, they don't tell others. What then?" Jesus answered quietly, "Oh, I have no other plans. I'm counting on them. I have no other plans."

What does it mean to be a fisher of men? Let's find out. Verse 18, "And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers." Walking by the Sea of Galilee. Gary mentioned something of the picturesque area that it is. I've eaten what they call now "Saint Peter's fish." It's the fish that's indigenous only to the Sea of Galilee. It looks bad; tastes great. Some of you've been there, and you know about that, that beautiful area. Just one of the most beautiful areas in all the earth. A little lake, at its widest point, the Sea of Galilee. By the way, Luke who was a world traveler, never called it a sea. He always called it a lake from his perspective. The widest point is seven and a half miles. At the longest point, it's 13 and a half miles. So, at best, seven and a half miles by 13 and a half miles, not very big. It's oval, wider at the top than it is at the bottom, about 618 feet below sea level. It's at the higher part of that whole valley that goes all the way to the Dead Sea, which is over 2,000 feet or nearly 2,000 feet below. It is one of the most fertile productive areas in the world.

In Jesus' time, you might be interested to know, the time in which this text was taking place, there were nine populous cities on its shore. By 1930, there was one little tiny village, Tiberius. Today, there's just one town left, Tiberius. It was literally thick with fishing boats in Jesus' day. In fact, Josephus writes of one fishing fleet that numbered 240 boats. That's a lot of boats on one like seven

and a half by 13 and a half mile lake. It was there that Jesus walked and found two brothers. Who were they? It tells us Simon, later called Peter, and Andrew, his brother.

Now, this is their call, but I want you to notice something. This is phase two of their call. I'm going to give you a little technical thing that'll help you in your study of the gospels. We have several different calls of the disciples in the gospel. Each gospel writer, for his own purposes, chooses one or the other. There was a sequence of things. In other words, there were at least five different times when Jesus sort of called them; each one taking them to a different level, kind of like you. Once you were called to salvation, right? Then, maybe there was a time in your life when you were called to a new level of commitment. Then, maybe there was a time in your life, like in my life, when you were called to serve Jesus Christ in a specific way. Then, maybe there was a time in your life when you were called to a specific place, to Grace Church, or some other specific ministry. In other words, the way God directs us may have phases, and that is true in the case of the disciples.

The first call is in John chapter 1. You can study it on your own, we're not going to take the time. This was their call to salvation. Andrew, John, Simon, Phillip, Nathaniel and James called to salvation. This was the initial call, and you remember it was when John the Baptist said, "Don't follow me anymore. Follow Him." They took off after Jesus Christ, and it was the call to salvation.

Now, this is phase two in Matthew 4:18. This is the call to be fishers of men. They're now going to follow Jesus, but it was only a kind of a momentary thing here. It isn't the full final departing from everything. For now, they followed Him. For this moment, for this day, for this time, they were called to win souls. They were called to fish for men. They were called to come after Him.

There's a third call. Luke records it in chapter 5. This comes after the one in Matthew; it's different. There are some similarities, but there are some distinct differences. As you look at Luke chapter 5 for a moment, you'll see them. I'll show you the level of call here. In Luke 5, He comes along, and the situation is a little different. They're still fishing, which indicates that the second phase, they did not leave their profession permanently. They simply followed Him for that moment, and now it's going to be a little more firm. He's not going to say, "I want you to just be fishers of men," generally. He's going to say, "I want you to be fishers of men only." This is the next step, and this time He stood by the Lake of Genessaret, which is another name for the Sea of Galilee. Of course, Luke calls it a lake, as I said, because he's been around. He's seen some big stuff, and that doesn't rank with it.

He saw two boats standing by the lake, and the fishermen were gone out of them and so forth. He entered into one of the boats, Simon's, and now there's a difference here. All of a sudden, we're in a boat. Different than the situation in Matthew. He says, "Launch out, let down your nets," and there's a whole fishing miracle that occurs here. This is a completely different account. What it is, is a time for them to come to grips with a real commitment, and Jesus reiterates it in verse 10. There were, "James and John, the sons of Zebedee, partners with Simon, and Jesus said to Simon, 'Fear not from henceforth,'" doesn't matter you can't catch fish anymore. You remember the story? They couldn't catch fish on their own, not without the Lord. He was going to control the fish.

He said, "You want fish? Put it down where I say, and you'll get fish. Without me, you won't get anything. Don't worry about whether you're going to be able to catch them without me. From now on you shall," what? "catch men. When they had brought their boats to land they forsook," what? "all and followed Him." You see this is another level of commitment.

I guess this is a part of our life, isn't it? At some point in time you come to Christ, and it isn't long after that somebody says to you, "You are to fish for men." But maybe it's a long time after that, and maybe it's never for a lot of folks, that you forsake all to catch men.

In Mark 3, there was another call. They were not just going to catch men. They were going to be official apostles. In verse 14, "He appointed twelve," Mark 3:14, "that they should be with Him, that He might send them forth to preach, and to cast out demons." Boy, now they've got miraculous power, and they were given the power also to heal diseases. So they went from salvation to a general call, to a specific total commitment, and now to a miraculous power.

Then finally, the fifth phase is recorded in the tenth chapter of Matthew in the first verse. "And when He had called to Him those twelve, He gave them power against unclean spirits to cast them out, to heal all manner of sickness and diseases." He said, "Go," in verse 7, and He told them all how to go, and He sent them out, verse 16, "As sheep in the midst of wolves," and they went to preach.

Now, do you see the progression here, beloved? It is to be so with us. It all begins at some point in time when we meet Jesus Christ, and we accept Him as Savior. Then a little later the prodding of the Spirit of God, fish for men. Then, hopefully later, you forsake all and your life is geared for that. Then the time comes when, in the midst of that, you sense the power of God, and you move out, an official sent one to do His work.

Well this is just phase two, but it's a beginning. He met these two, Simon and Andrew. What were they doing? It says, "They were casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers." Now, there were three methods of fishing in those days. The first one was by line, rod and reel type; only they use a stick with a string on it. They could fish by line.

Second is what is called the drag net. Now a drag net was used from a boat, or better, two boats. It was cast into the sea with ropes at each of the four corners, and it had weight at the foot of it so that it would sink right down into the water. Of course, when the boat rowed, it would just scoop up the fish. They would pull the ropes tight at the top, and the net would be full of fish. The Bible talks about a drag net in Matthew chapter 13.

So, as the boats were rowed, it became a great cone, as it were, in the sea. Weighted at the very end, it would fall into a cone shape, and it would just scoop up the fish. They would tie the ropes tight at the end, and they would be caught. Then there was what was called the casting net, and that's what they were using here. They were casting a net; not *sagn*, which is the drag net. They were casting it. This is a circular net about nine feet in diameter, and they were really skillful at it. They knew how to cast it from the shore, from the edge of the lake. You could be knee deep in water, and it had pellets all around the edges, kind of weighted down with little stones or whatever they would use. It would sink and surround the fish, and they would pull the rope, and pull it in.

That's what they were doing. You say, "Well, what are you telling me all that for?" I think it's interesting. The word, incidentally is *amphiblastron*, from which we get "amphibious," having to do with standing on the shore and throwing something into the water, sort of two ways. But what interests me is this, Jesus said, "You're going to catch men." He played on that metaphor. The way they did it was they threw out a big net and caught a whole bunch of fish, and I like that thought. I'm

glad they weren't fishing just for one. I like the fact that Jesus said, "There's going to be a lot of them."

The Lord, when He thought about evangelism, He had a lot of folks in mind. So He called these, Simon and Andrew, but also look at verse 21, "And going from there, He saw two other brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a boat with Zebedee their father mending their nets; and He called them." Now He's got four here, and He has a plan for them. They're rough jewels, these guys. I want you to know that. They are rough jewels. They are tough, crusty, outdoorsmen. No doubt a certain crudeness. We know that in the case of Peter, and no doubt true of the others to some extent. They had a lot of problems. They had a lack of spiritual perception. It didn't matter what Jesus said for the first few months of His ministry, they never did figure it out.

He would speak to them what the Hebrews called the *mashal*, a veiled saying, and they'd scratch their head, "What are you talking about? We don't understand that." They had very limited perception of the spiritual dimension. The parables of Matthew 13 just went right on by them. They didn't get the message. Jesus continued to talk to them in terms that they couldn't understand. They were scratching around for a long time, trying to figure them out. Jesus had to unravel everything. They had a lot of learning to do. They had a terrible lack of sympathy. They were really an unsympathetic bunch.

If you read, I think it's Matthew 14:15, "And when it was evening, his disciples came to Him saying, 'This is a desert place, and the time is now late. Send the multitude away that they may go to the villages and buy food.'" Get rid of this crowd, or they're going to get hungry. We're going to have to feed them. Well, that's not exactly hospitality at its best. They were unsympathetic.

They had a terrible lack of humility. They were just a lot of proud guys, and I imagine hanging around Jesus they sort of felt better than anybody else. A little child came along in Matthew 18, and they said, "Kick that kid away. We can't be bothered with children." They weren't even very forgiving guys. Peter said, "Lord if a guy offends me, I mean how many times should I forgive him?" The Lord said, "Four hundred and ninety times." Gulp!

They were terrible at prayer meeting. They kept falling asleep. They didn't have a whole lot of courage. When the shepherd was smitten, the sheep were scattered, right? Great bunch! No spiritual perception, no sympathy, no humility, no sense of forgiveness, not able to persevere in prayer, and a bunch of cowards. "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." That'll tell you what the Lord can do with you and me. He's terrific with raw material that shows little or no potential. It's a good lesson too.

I know something, though. Jesus saw something there, didn't He? He saw something in them. He knew what He was doing. He picked out a potential. He saw it there. I thought to myself, as I was going through this, that the fact that He picked fishermen is sort of a rebuke to the whole Jewish system, isn't it? I mean why didn't He pick rabbis to be His team; great, brilliant, astute, knowledgeable rabbis, or great leaders of Israel? Fishermen? What do they know? They'd never been to school. Maybe they can't even read. He relied on something better, didn't He, than worldly wisdom? Something better than human influence, something better than formal religion, something better than education, something better than ritual. "Not many noble, not many mighty," said Paul. "He's chosen the foolish things of the world," the base things of the world.

Matthew Broadus, the great commentator, who's written the wonderful work on Matthew says, "They were perhaps less prepossessed by the follies of Pharisaic tradition, and thus better prepared for receiving and transmitting new doctrine; and they were eminently men of the people. It is probable that all of the twelve were men in comparatively humble life without the learning of the rabbinical schools." In Acts 4:13, the people said, "Who are these people, and what do they know?" Galileans.

Look at verse 19, "But it was to them that He said, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.'" Beloved, look, we Christians miss the point. So many times we say, "Oh, if so-and-so famous person could just become a Christian, think of how many they'd win." Do you know, the Lord never picked those people from the start? "If such-and-such, if he ever became converted, what an influence he'd have!" He never picked them. He didn't come in and pick the Olympic team. Now, nothing wrong with them. He didn't come in and pick the great geniuses. He just picked the humble fishermen. They were people of the people, and God is always identified with the people, with the poor, as well as the poor in spirit.

Now, notice verse 19. I love this. "He said unto them, 'Follow me, and I'll make you fishers of men.'" Isn't that a great promise? I'll make you fishers of men. I'm not asking for something I'm not willing to commit myself to do. They were already believers, as we found in John 1, and this is now their second phase. I have a task, "You're to be fishers for men." Boy they got the message. That's such a vivid picture to them; they knew exactly what He was talking about.

Did you ever think about how you could apply fishing? I don't know anything about fishing, especially fishing with a net. But did you ever think about how you could apply fishing skill to fishing for men? Good fishermen have certain qualities. Number one, patience, right? When anybody says to me, "I cannot stand fishing," I know there's an impatient person, right off the bat. Fishermen learn to wait; so do we if we're good at fishing for men. You've got to be patient. Secondly, fishermen have a quality of perseverance. It's amazing. They do it over and over and over and over, and they go, and they'll come back. "Well, we didn't catch anything, but we'll go again," over and over. Perseverance.

The third thing that fishermen have is courage. "My boat is so small, and the sea is so large," the prose line goes. They'll face the sea for the cause of the fish.

Fishermen also seem to have an eye for the right moment. If you just talk to a fisherman who knows his stuff, he'll tell you when and where. So, the good soul winner chooses his moment, his location carefully. Have you ever noticed that good fishermen will always tell you to stay out of sight? I remember when I was a little kid, and I went fishing with my Uncle Charlie back East. I'd hang out of the boat, and he'd say, "Don't hang out of the boat." I'd be looking out of the boat. He was worried that the fish – well, he was probably worried they'd see me and be scared or something. "Don't hang out of the boat. You're not supposed to be seen. If you're going to catch fish, you have to stay so they can't see you." Oh. I don't know if it's true or not, but it's a good analogy.

A good soul winner keeps himself out of the picture. He hides his own presence, even his own shadow, and makes sure that the gaze is fixed on Jesus Christ.

So he said, "You men know about patience. You men know about perseverance. You know about courage. You have an eye for the right moment, and you know how to hide yourselves to

accomplish your end. I choose you to fish for men.” Then He said, “I’ll make you fishers of men.” You know what? That was a commitment on the part of Jesus to train them, to teach them.

There’s really only one way to teach somebody to win people, and that’s to take them out and do it.

That’s why I think our ministry here through our “Evangelism Explosion” ministry is so great, because it’s people making people into fishers of men. You can’t just get up and say, “All right everybody run out and be fishers of men.” You’ve got to teach them. You’ve got to teach them.

Some of them don’t know how to bait the hook. Some of them don’t know how to reel it in. Some of them don’t know how to throw the net. Jesus said, “I’ll make you fishers of men.” I’ll teach you how, and He did.

You know how long it took Him to train these guys? How long? Three years, three years. Isn’t that amazing? First, what He did is this; He spent a little while with them, get them kind of shipshape, and then He let them go out two by two, Matthew 10. Just kind of go out and then they’d come back, and they’d go out, and then they’d come back, always having to come and report. Two by two, they’d go out, and they’d come back. Finally, in Matthew 28 He said, “I’m leaving, you’re on your own. You’ve graduated.” Jesus’ training method? Call them to Himself, let them know the commission, trade them out and back to give a report. They’d come back and they’d say, “This happened and this happened, and you know what happened here? You know what happened there?” He’d send them out again. They’d come back again. Finally, they were trained, and He left.

How did He do it? Have you ever analyzed how Jesus trained soul winners? Let me just give you some brief insights. Our time is nearly gone. First, listen to this. As you look at the New Testament, this is what you find. How did Jesus win people? They watched Him. He didn’t give them 45 lectures. He just did it, and they watched and they learned.

First of all, here are the methods Jesus used in brief. Number one, He was available. As I study the life of Christ, I notice that He was always in the throngs. Do you ever notice that? He was always where the crowd was. He was always where the sinners were. In fact, they said about Him, “You’re always hanging around sinners.” He was there, and they got the message that’s where they needed to be.

Secondly, He had no favorites. He didn’t run around with the fancy folks. He didn’t run around with the rich. He didn’t run around with the famous. He didn’t run around with the religious. It didn’t matter what their social standing was. Oh, He would reach a wealthy Jairus, but He’d also spend time with a harlot. He knew no favorites. He was available, and He had no favorites.

The third thing I see about Jesus in His approach to winning people was He was totally sensitive.

Boy, He could spot an open heart just that fast. Can you? Have you learned how to see an open heart? You remember Jesus in Mark 5 in the crowd, and everybody was shoving Him, and He said He could hardly move because of the press? They were just - not the press like we know the press, but the press of the crowd. He could hardly move. He was just crushed in, and then the Bible says He turned around and said, “Who touched me?” You say, “Are you kidding? Who touched you?”

“Yes, who touched me?” There was a woman with an issue of blood, who had reached out for one of the four tassels that always hung from the robe of a rabbi, and grabbed it. He knew there was a sensitive heart, and He called that woman out of that crowd. He healed that woman’s issue of blood, and He elicited out of her heart a confession of faith in Him.

He was sensitive. He could spot that one in the mob with the open heart. Sensitive to the Spirit. Do you know you can do that? If you're walking in the Spirit, I believe the Spirit of God will lead you to that person.

He was available. He had no favorites. He was sensitive. Fourthly, and I already hinted at it, He secured a public confession. He didn't let people just run away. I remember that woman in Mark 5. He made her call out her confession. She couldn't get away. She touched the hem of His garment. She was healed, but that wasn't enough. By the way, Mark says she had really been through it. She had suffered many things at the hands of many physicians. Mark says that. Luke doesn't record that part, for obvious reasons.

The disciples said to Him, "What do you mean who touched you? Can't you see the crowd?" But Jesus drew that woman out of the crowd. He said, "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole. Go in peace and be whole of thy plague." He drew out of her the confession of faith. We need to do that. To be effective with people, you need to cause them to come to the place where they will publicly with their mouth confess Him as Lord.

Another thing about Jesus; He used love and tenderness. I think about it in so many ways. Look what He did in John chapter 8 with that scarlet woman, that woman who had been abused by all kinds of men, who was a harlot of the worst category. What about Mary Magdalene? What about all these times in Matthew? For example, in Matthew 8 - do you know that in Matthew 8, Jesus reached out and touched a leper? He had tenderness toward the sinner.

Then, one other thing. He always took time. He always took time. Boy, the Lord speaks to me about this. I'm always in a hurry, always got to go, always got a big project, always got a meeting I've got to get to. I've got so much time for the ministry; I've got no time for the people. He took time. In the midst of the mass of people in Mark 5, Jairus comes, and He takes time. Jairus tells Him a long story about his daughter. Many people, but He took time.

For three years, Jesus trained His men how to be available, how to have no favorites, how to be sensitive, how to secure a public confession, how to use love and tenderness and how to take time and to apply everything they ever knew as fishermen; patience, perseverance, courage, an eye for the right moment, and hide themselves in the midst of all of it. I think whoever said it is right when he said, "Evangelism is not taught as much as it's caught," like everything else in the Christian life.

So, they learned. He trained them, and that's our desire, people. Several years ago, we brought - I guess all of you know Jim George on our staff. We could have hired a man to do visitation, to go out and evangelize. You know what we did? We decided to support a man, who would train others to evangelize. If we had just hired a man to evangelize, you know what we'd have now five years later? We'd have a man evangelizing, but instead we've got between 200 and 300 people trained to catch men. That's what Jesus did.

Well, what was their response? This is the conclusion. "They straightway left their nets and followed Him." Verse 22 says of the others, James and John, "And they immediately left the boat and their father and followed Him." I love that. Instant obedience. Boy, as Jerry said, that speaks of authority. When you walk along the shore, and you say to these guys, "Follow me," and they do; that says

something about you, doesn't it? Whenever I see a picture of Jesus as some emaciated, puny, little, shriveled up, character who looks like He couldn't scare a flea - that is not the Christ here.

You walk along to these burly guys and say, "Follow me," and they drop everything, walk away from their father, and follow you? You've got something going. They did. Obedience. You say, "Well did they have a great passion for souls?" I doubt it, seriously doubt it. I'm quite confident they didn't have a passion for anything. So what they'd do it for? Listen, you want to know something? You want to know how to get a passion for souls? Try obeying to start with. That's where it all begins. Just be obedient. I put it this way; obedience is the spark that lights the fire of passion. The way to gain a passion for souls, the way to have your heart burn for the lost is to obey God and move out, and watch God take the pilot light of obedience and fan it into a forest fire.

David Brainerd, that great missionary to the Indians, who died so young in his twenties, said, "Oh, if I were a flame of fire in my Master's cause." Henry Martyn said, "Now let me burn out for God." Alexander MacLaren, that great preacher said, "Tell me depths of a Christian's compassion, and I'll tell you the measure of his usefulness." Well, where does it all start? Where do you get such a passion? Where do you get such a desire to burn for God? Where does it come from? It comes right out of the pilot light of obedience.

Dr. Cortland Myers, in his book, *How Do We Know?* writes of Robert Murray M'Cheyne, one of Scotland's greatest preachers who died at the age of 29. This is what Meyers says, "Everywhere he stepped, Scotland shook. Whenever he opened his mouth, a spiritual force swept in every direction. Thousands followed him to the feet of Christ."

"A traveler eager to see where M'Cheyne had preached went to the Scottish town and found the old church. An old gray-haired janitor agreed to take him through the church. He led the way into M'Cheyne's study. 'Sit in that chair,' the janitor ordered. The traveler hesitated a moment, then sat in the chair. On the table before him was an open Bible. 'Drop your head in that book and weep. That's what our minister did before he preached,' said the old man. He then led the visitor into the pulpit before the open Bible. 'Stand there,' he said, 'and drop your head into your hands and let the tears flow. That's the way our minister always did before he began to preach.'"

So, Cortland Myers said, "With such a passion for souls lost and needy, is it any wonder that the Holy Spirit gave M'Cheyne a magnetic personality, which drew so many to the Savior?"

Well, where does it begin? You say, "That seems so far from me." Where does it begin? It begins in the pilot of obedience. That's the spark that starts the fire. So, the Lord, listen, He needs special people to help Him. He needs a well-trained life-saving crew at Grace Community Church. He does not need a comfortable club. He doesn't need that. The church has had enough of that stuff. He needs well-trained life-saving crews. He needs fishers of men. You say, "Can I do that?" Yeah. You say, "How?" Listen, number one, be a believer. You can't be on the team unless you are.

Number two, be available. Learn how to win people to Christ. If that means getting involved in an evangelism ministry, then get involved. If that means reading the New Testament and underlining everything about evangelism and cataloging it and learning it, do it. Be a believer and be available.

Three, be concerned, be concerned. Maybe that means reading some books. Surely, it means

meeting some unsaved people. It all starts with obedience, so be obedient. Go out and do it. Even if the passion isn't there, do it. Reach out to that neighbor. Speak the words you've always wanted to speak and never have. Then, realize Jesus is your pattern. Study how He did it. Then, find somebody else you can follow, and let them be your model.

Be a believer, be available, be concerned, be obedient, be following Jesus, and be taught by an example. So, Jesus began at the right point, in the right place, with the right proclamation, and the right partners. The light dawned, beloved, and we're to carry it to the rest of the world.

I'll close with this. When I was in college, Dave Hocking and I and Bruce Peterson, who is a deacon in our church - Dave Hocking is the pastor of Grace Brethren Church in Long Beach. Ed Byrd, associate pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Los Gatos, Lenny Seidel, who you remember now ministering in the East. We all started a quartet. We had a theme song, and that theme song, the title of it some of you probably have heard, "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning." You remember that? We used to sing that all the time. In fact, I know the baritone part so well, I don't think I know the melody. That was our theme.

I didn't really know what that meant. We used to sing, "Let the lower lights be burning," and somebody came up to afterward and say, "What are the lower lights?" We'd kind of grin and say, "It's a nice melody." What are the lower lights? You know that whole hymn came from a story that D. L. Moody told? This is it.

Moody said a vessel was coming in to Cleveland Harbor on a stormy, stormy night. In order for the vessel to know where it was, there were two sets of lights in the harbor; one set on the bluff, very high, and one set right on the coastline, So there was always a perspective in the blackness, and they could see by the upper and lower lights where they were. But this night, the pilot saw the upper lights on the bluff burning, but not the lower. So, the pilot asked the captain if he'd better put back out into the lake again, lest they go in too far and hit the rocks. But the captain was so afraid of the storm on the lake, he thought they'd better try to make the harbor.

Moody said they made it, but they were wrecked and many drowned all because the lower lights had been put out by the storm. Hmm, and then Moody said, listen, "The upper lights in heaven are burning as brightly as ever they've burned. What about the lower lights?"

Father we thank you, we thank you for the calling that we have to do this work for you. We give you praise, and ask that you would make of us the kind of people who are fishers of men, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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