

Follow Me, Part 1; Mark 1:16-20 0271

Who is this man to tell people to leave their business? Who is this man to tell people to leave their families?

We all love a grand entrance, right? As people, we just really appreciate a big grand entrance when it's an important person, or an important event. That's just what we anticipate. And we expect that when there's a certain importance surrounding an event, or a happening, that just needs a big entrance. Just think for a minute about a wedding. What is the climax of a wedding ceremony? It's not the vows. It is not the kiss, the climax of a wedding ceremony is the entrance of the bride. That's the grand entrance.

And so,, as people, we liked that we like a big event to have a big grand entrance. And so, that's one of the things that's going to surprise us about our passage this morning. Because in our passage this morning, the building of the kingdom of God begins in earnest, yet it does so, without not just without a grand entrance, but even with such a mediocre sort of normal entrance, we're going to see just this entrance of the kingdom of God in the sense of just calling some fishermen to come and join along.

So, that's our passage for us this morning, we are in Mark chapter one, we'll be looking this morning of verses 16 through 20. We want to use a few Bible then we're on page 994.

Verses 16 through 20. Mark has prepared us for the initiation of the kingdom, he has taught us about the preparation of the Messiah, the proclamation for the message--repent and be baptized, receive this baptism of repentance to prepare for Messiah. And Messiah has come, he himself has been baptized and immersed into the waters of the people's sinfulness because he will bear their sin, he will become their sin for them. And so, being prepared, he has been anointed by the Spirit which has come down upon him. And likewise, the father from Heaven has spoken and declared, "This is my son, and he is well loved." And so, therefore he has vested the son with all the authority not just to speak on God's behalf, but to speak as God and not to just to act on God's behalf, but to act as God.

And so, having done this, he then enters into his time of preparation, in the sense of the temptation in the wilderness, the 40 days of extreme torment and suffering as he is tempted in every conceivable way, and far beyond all the ways that we could even conceive as the Son of God, as the human Jesus, in the power of the Spirit endures and emerges victorious from everything that the forces of evil have to throw against him for those 40 days of fasting and temptation.

He emerges from the wilderness. And then as last week, we saw he begins proclaiming the message of the Kingdom, the message is, the true King is here, the strong man is here, and he's going to cast out the false strong man, the false King, the illegitimate King, who has established his illegitimate kingdom in the kingdom of the righteous, the rightful ruler, the true king, the strong man. But the strong man is now here. And he's now ready to begin casting out the lesser strong man, the illegitimate ruler, so, to speak. And all that begins for us today in our passage from verse 16, through 20.

So, with that quick introduction, let's just read here, and we're going to see how such a grand entrance is not going to be present, we would expect that this beginning initiation of the kingdom would begin with these mighty miracles, with perhaps maybe the Son of God would come and split the Sea of Galilee or maybe cause the sun to stand still in the sky while he assembled his 12 apostles around him. But nothing of the sort is going to take place. Instead, it's just going to be just a simple calling of four people to leave their fishing nets and come and follow Him.

So, let's read from verse 16, through verse 20. Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon, (I'm sorry), Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, follow me and I will make you become fishers of men. And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 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. And immediately called them and they left their father's Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

So, the story that is before us today is a story that can fool us. And it can fool us because of its familiarity. We are so, familiar with the calling of the disciples and the leaving of their net and come and follow me and I'll make you fishers of men. We're so, familiar with this story, that the story loses, quite frankly, all of its edge. Because the story has quite a lot of edge to it. In fact, this is a story that seems to us, just sort of those warm, fuzzy kind of stories, you know, here's Jesus, and he calls these fishermen and they drop their nets, and they follow Him, and they're going to become fishers of men. Such a nice little cuddly warm story. And we like cuddly warm stories about Jesus.

This is the time of the year that we're celebrating the incarnation of Christ and what more cuddly, warm story about Jesus is there than Jesus as a baby? So, we like these stories that just sort of make us feel good about what Jesus does and how he calls these fishermen, and they just immediately leave their nets and follow him. But this story, once we begin seeing the story and thinking, with open eyes about the story, we will see that this story is not a feel good, warm and cuddly story. This is in fact, an outrageous story. This is a radical story. This is a story that presents in our face something of the truth of the kingdom of God, that will make us uncomfortable. Because this is a story of a man who saw fit, to speak to people and tell them to leave everything they knew.

What gave him the right? Who is this man to tell people to leave their business? Who is this man to tell people to leave their families? I mean, who does he think he is, is he some sort of a king? Is he someone who thinks that he has authority to just tell these people to leave their livelihood, the business that they have built? In fact, in the case of James and John, the business, the business that their father has built, they have families that are relying upon them. And Jesus just takes the prerogative to just tell them to immediately leave everything, and they do. So, Is he some sort of a king?

Imagine, if you will, that this is the first time you've read this story, and I know that can be difficult because we're so, familiar with the story. And we know that the story is about the King of the universe. But just imagine, if you can, that this is the first time you've encountered this story, you would undoubtedly be left with the question, who is this man? Is he some sort of a king Is he some sort of a master over these people.

So, he speaks these words, and they stop what they're doing. And they leave. And Mark wants to leave us with an impression of what Jesus has done to initiate his kingdom that will startle us, that will stun us, and that will leave us in awe of one thing and one thing only, and that is the sovereign call of Jesus Christ upon a man.

So, let's just begin with verse 16. And walk along through it with me. Verse 16, passing along the Sea of Galilee. So, we'll pause right there at the Sea of Galilee. And we'll talk for just a few minutes about the Sea of Galilee. And the reason we'll do this is not because the Sea of Galilee is important for the story. But because the Sea of Galilee plays in such a central role throughout not just the gospel of Mark, but all the Gospels.

The Sea of Galilee is the location for which most of the events of Jesus's life up until the last week of His life are going to take place. So, if you put up on the screen here, this is a picture of the Sea of Galilee, a modern day picture of the Sea of Galilee just kind of give you a visual image. And you can see there the mountains in the distance. That's the way the Sea of Galilee is. It's surrounded on all sides by mountainous terrain.

The east side is a little less steep, a little gentler than the west side. The west side is the side that Jesus is going to spend most of his time on. But that's basically the terrain around the Sea of Galilee. Now the Sea of Galilee is one of the most misnamed bodies of water in the world. Because a sea it is not. It's a lake. It's seven miles wide by 13 miles long. So, it's a nice a nice decent sized lake, but it is not a sea. In fact, it's known as a lake in other contexts It's called Lake Tiberius, by most of the people that live in the area.

Around the Sea of Galilee, there's one city, and that city is the city of Tiberius. There's a number of villages, about 16 farming villages, or fishing villages around the edge of the of the Sea of Galilee, but there's one city and that city is Tiberius. And so, many people refer to the body of water as Lake Tiberius.

Others, such as Luke, will refer to the same body of water as Lake Gennesaret. But Mark refers to it as the Sea of Galilee. And so, it's a tiny little bottle body of water. It's actually we're familiar with the Dead Sea, the Dead Sea being 1400 feet below sea level, well the Sea of Galilee many don't understand, many don't realize this but the Sea of Galilee is also below sea level. It's about 700 feet below sea level.

So, the Sea of Galilee is in the far extreme north of Israel. It's fed from the north by the Jordan River, and it's emptied to the south by the Jordan River as well into what we know of as the Dead Sea. And this Sea of Galilee, this little body of water seven miles wide by 13 miles tall, is one of the world's premier bodies of water for supplying edible fish, in fact, fish that are considered delicacies. So, we're told that many, many species of fish are native only to the Sea of Galilee. Species of fish that are native to other areas now have been populated from other areas or to other areas from the Sea of Galilee. So, in Jesus's day, the Sea of Galilee would have been home to a number of species of fish that were only found there. In fact, my favorite fish to eat, which is tilapia, we are told was native only to the Sea of Galilee. So, in Jesus's day, the only place that you would have eaten tilapia would have been tilapia caught from the Sea of Galilee.

So, the Sea of Galilee was an extremely productive body of water for supplying the staple food of the entire Greco-Roman world. The Greco-Roman world subsisted mainly, not upon livestock meat, red meat, but mainly upon fish. And the greatest portion of that came from the Sea of Galilee. In fact, it was exported, not just to the surrounding region, but it was exported as far away as Alexandria, Egypt--as far away as you can export fish in that day, before it spoiled was it was the distance that this fish was exported.

So, what that what that tells us is that these four men who are we're going to see in a story today that are fishermen that are called to follow Jesus, what it tells us is that they were engaged in an industry that was extraordinarily profitable, and extraordinarily productive for that time.

So, we have this perception, I think that oftentimes in the modern church, we portray the fisherman as sort of these, almost like day laborers. That Jesus just called these lowly sort of fishermen to follow him. And really, they didn't have very many better prospects in life, so, they followed him because being I mean, who wants to be a fisherman?

But actually the case is that in Jesus day, those fishermen on the on the Sea of Galilee, were not anything like what we would think of as sort of a day laborer or a semi-skilled laborer or even an unskilled laborer

type of position. They were very astute business people. They understood their business well, and in fact, there was theirs was an international business. So, in order to be a productive, successful fisherman, in Jesus day, you had to understand not only to fish, the species of fish, and how to catch the fish, you had to also understand sailing, you had to understand boats, you had to understand navigation on the Sea of Galilee. And you also had to speak fluent Greek, because Greek was the international language of commerce.

And so, these fishermen that we're about to meet here, they were men who would have been astute businessman. In fact, we're told that James and John, they're working on their father's boat, with hired servants with hired workers. So, theirs was a business that was large enough and successful enough to employ workers. Likewise, Luke's Gospel in Luke chapter five tells us that Peter was also working on his boat when Jesus called him. So, Peter also is going to be this successful fishermen business type of person. Not only successful, but astute in what they do possessing skills in both fishing, skills in sailing and skills in international business, because they would have been fluent in Greek.

We think of Peter, who's later on going to write the Epistles--First and Second Peter in Greek. We think of John, the brother of James and the story here, he is going to be the apostle whom Jesus loved. He is going to write the Gospel of John, he's going to write the three epistles of John who's going to write the Revelation--all of all of them in Greek.

So, they're going to be fluent, their native, their native language is Aramaic, they speak Greek fluently, and they quite possibly speak Latin fluently, because Latin was also predominant in the land.

So, these are intelligent people, they're astute businessman, and they work here on the Sea of Galilee, as you see kind of picture here. Now. Now, this picture here is obviously on one of the smaller ends of the lake of the Sea of Galilee, because that's clearly it's not eight miles across right there. But nonetheless, it was a small type of body of water, surrounded by this mountainous sort of region. This is going to play home, this is going to be scene, this is going to be the context for the next at least 10 chapters of Mark's gospel and for the bulk of all the Gospels.

So, let's take a look at the next screen. The next screen, we got another map, we looked at a map last week, but let's look again at a map of the region. And this will just kind of help us to get a grasp of what's happening, not only in today's story, but as we go forward. So, as you can see here, the Sea of Galilee is surrounded by hillsides. And you can see that northern edge there you see Capernaum, and you see Corazain, you see Bethsaida. Now, Bethsaida is the home of Peter and Andrew. Peter and Andrew who we are told our brothers are from Bethsaida. We also see Corazain in their cores. And on this map it's spelled with a K, in your Bible it's probably spelled with a C, but it's the same city, or the same village. And you see Capernaum.

Now, if you could, in your mind, draw a triangle connecting those three towns, Bethsaida, Corazain, and Capernaum, you would end up with this triangle that sometimes people call the Jesus Triangle or the Gospel Triangle--anybody ever heard of the Jesus triangle? The Jesus triangle is this imaginary triangle between those three villages, inside of which Jesus spent the great majority of his time. So, in that region right there, in fact--I've never been to the Holy Land, but those who have would probably tell us that if you go on tours of the Holy Land, they probably want to focus in that area, because that is the area that outside of the Passion of Christ in Jerusalem, that is where Jesus spent the great bulk of his time, at least three years of his adult ministry.

So, this area to the north here--Bethsaida, we said, Jesus is going to visit there a bunch. Peter's from there. In fact, in a couple of stories, Jesus is going to heal Peter's mother-in-law in Bethsaida. We also see Corazim there, we hear Jesus talk about, and then we see Capernaum as well.

Now you also kind of see there, going around to the side, you see Gennesaret, we see that. You see Magdala. Magdala is--you can hear in the word there Magdala, someone who was from Magdala would have been a Magdalene. And so, therefore we know that that's--somebody's from there. Mary the Magdalene or Mary Magdalene is from Magdala.

Now all these names here have to do with fish. So, Bethsaida is the house of the fisherman. Magdala is fish tower, whatever fish tower was, but all these you can tell just the whole area is steeped in the industry of fishing. Kind of like if you were to visit, I don't know, like the coast of Maine or the coast of, of Connecticut or something like just some places just deeply entrenched in the culture of fishing and the industry of fishing. This is the area that in which Jesus is going to live and Jesus is going to minister.

So, he's going to spend a lot of time around that area, this western side or the eastern side here, this is where Jesus is going to feed the 4000. The eastern side of the lake there is much more desolate than the western side. He's going to spend quite a bit of time on the Sea of Galilee itself, in boats teaching. The Sea of Galilee is where he's going to walk on the water, it's where he's going to calm the storm. So, he's going to spend a lot of time on the water itself. This is just going to be the home for the next, like I say 10 or 12 chapters of Mark's gospel at least.

Okay, so, now being familiar here with the Sea of Galilee, just a little bit, you can take down the map. And now, having that sort of in our mind, let's begin here with verse 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.

So, here we're told, we're introduced to Simon. Now Simon, also known as Peter, he's going to be renamed as Peter later on. So, he'll be referred to as Simon, he'll be referred to as Peter. And he'll be referred to as Simon Peter. And he'll be referred to as the guy with the foot in his mouth as well. But we know Peter, and Mark's gospel is going to refer to Peter far more frequently than any other gospel, which makes sense to us. Because as we've said before, the gospel of Mark is kind of like Peter's memoirs. Peter is telling these stories to Mark, and Mark's writing them down. So, it makes sense that we're referred to Peter quite a lot, quite often in the course of the gospel.

So, we're introduced to Peter and his brother, Andrew, the brother of Simon, and they're casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. So, they're, they're in process of fishing, casting their net into the sea, and so, what we see here is that they're doing net fishing, instead of what we know of is line fishing. We think of fishing as something that's rather relaxing, and enjoyable to do--you know, you sort of cast your line out there, and you sort of sit and reel it in, or just sort of watch your bobber, whatever type of fishing that you do. And that's a relaxing sort of enjoyable activity.

Net Fishing--not so, much. Because net fishing was nothing but work. So, the way that net fishing works is that the fisherman would have a circular net, that would be as much as 20 feet in diameter. And on the edges of the net would be weights. And so, the whole idea to net fishing was at the fishermen was to cast the net into the water in such a way that it would land flat. So, the fishermen would sort of spin the net onto the water so, that the centrifugal force of the net as it spun around would cause the weights to swing out thereby flattening the net so, that the net hit the water flat, so, that it would then sink and then hopefully and trap some fish on his way down. That was how net fishing worked.

And then to retrieve the net, which would hopefully then have some fish in, it would depend on where you cast the net. If you're fishing close to the shore, lots of times they would fishing in this case, in fact, Peter appears to be fishing from the shore. So, if you're fishing from the shore, you would just dive down and pick up the net, and hopefully catch the fish in it. If you're fishing away from the shore, then you would have, perhaps a system of ropes and what you pulled it, and then the weights within enclose around the fish and hopefully bring them up. And that's how you fish by a net.

So, you can imagine just the amount of work that's involved. Imagine a net that's 20 feet in diameter, or even 15 feet in diameter with weights around the perimeter of it. And then you have to--one person--has to throw this net in such a way in which they put a centrifugal force onto it, that it not only goes out onto the water, but it goes out onto the water spinning in such a way that it flattens out and lands. And then once it then sinks down, you got to then pull it up with not just the weight of the net itself, but hopefully some fish in there as well. And then empty out the fish from the net, and then do it again. And you do that all day long.

So, this was a grueling type of activities. It was not sort of let's go, let's go net fishing this afternoon and have some fun. Wasn't that at all, it was hard work. And so, they're engaged in this activity of net fishing, they're casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.

Verse 17, and Jesus said to them, follow me. And that will make you become fishers of men. Now that is so, familiar to us, that it doesn't even strike us as anything odd. But the reader of Mark's gospel in Mark's day would have been awestruck by that, for a number of reasons.

First of all, they would have been struck by that because that kind of language had never been used before. In the Old Testament scriptures, there are four or maybe five references to catching people by means of fishing. We see them in the prophets, and I think in your notes, I put a reference from Amos, there's one from Habakkuk, Ezekiel in there. But in each and every instance in which a metaphor is used of catching a person by means of fishing, it's always a negative. It's always the catching of sin or catching of sinful people, or people being caught by sin. Never was the metaphor used in relation to the kingdom of God catching people for itself.

So, that would have been a real stunner that Jesus would use this metaphor of fishing for people to mean something righteous, and to mean something holy, and godly.

This also would have been quite stunning, because, well, quite frankly, no one in the Old Testament had ever said anything about following them--with the one possible exception of Elijah's words to Elisha. And that's in itself isn't even a direct comparison, because we talked about that, if you think back to when we studied the story of Elijah and Elisha, but that's the only thing that comes close to anyone in the Old Testament saying anything about follow me.

Instead, the prophets' message was always--follow, not even God, follow his rules. Follow His statutes, follow his teaching, follow His Word.

So, nothing in the Old Testament had prepared anyone for this man to come along and say, Follow me. And so, now that's a double stunner. Now, the final piece to the pie, so, to speak, would be when Jesus now says, follow me, do you see the Divinity, the claim to divinity that he places upon himself, when he pronounces something that no prophet had ever pronounced. That God Himself through His prophets had never even said, follow God. And now here comes Jesus onto the scene with these words, follow me. To

Mark's reader, they would have been hit nearly just out of the gate here with this absolute claim of divinity. Here's this man who presumes to tell people to follow Him.

Now, in Jesus's day, higher education was done that way. We think of Socrates and Aristotle. We think of sort of the traveling philosopher sage kind of person. And that's how higher education sort of went. There was this sage kind of a guy, and there was his disciples. Paul was a disciple of Gamaliel. And we know of, of these instances in which they were these traveling teachers and people would sort of follow them as their disciples learning from them.

But no instance, in all of us secular or other biblical history tells us of a sage or a teacher, choosing his pupils. Instead, it was always the other way around. It was always the pupils choosing the teacher, and then having some sort of application, maybe there was a test, or maybe there was a sort of a trial period. And if the teacher then accepted them, they could then continue to follow him. That's always how it worked in that--Socrates, Aristotle sort of sort of timeframe.

And so, here comes Jesus, saying what the prophets never said, clearly placing the role of deity upon himself the identity of deity upon himself. And then furthermore, having the audacity to choose his students to say, you follow me. You, let's go, you're following me now.

So, immediately, we're struck by just the whole context of what's taking place here so, they were fishermen casting their net or something Jesus said to them, follow me and I will make you become fishers of men.