

Jesus' First Message

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[0 : 0 0] If you could turn please back in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 4. And in Matthew chapter 4, as we've kind of hinted already, we see Jesus and He's at the beginning of His public ministry.

And so we actually have here in Matthew chapter 4 and verse 17, we have the first words that Jesus speaks in His ministry.

And it's important that we see that and we know that because we know that the first words that are spoken are always important words. I mean think about a monarch that just comes into power, or think about a president or a prime minister who's making their first speech.

The first speech is hugely important because it sets the tone for everything that's going to follow. And what we have here in Matthew 4 is that the opening words of Jesus as public ministry begins. And the opening words of Jesus in verse 17 are repent, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

[1 : 3 0] And even this way we think about that for a moment. It underlines the seriousness of the gospel message. This is a call to repentance.

If a PR advisor was to be giving some advice to a person in the public place who's about to make their first speech, there would be things said like, well start in a positive, start with a smile, flash your teeth, tell a funny story, say something warm and affirming.

That would be the advice of today. And yet Jesus who is the Word made flesh, the first thing he says, the thing that he repeatedly says is repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And it's good that at the beginning of a community weekend we start with that word, repent. We need to examine ourselves as we prepare to come to the Lord's table.

And as we examine ourselves, we see our sin. And as we see our sin, we repent. Knowing that as we confess our sin, as we repent, there is forgiveness and there is blessing.

[2 : 5 8] So what I want to think about this evening and what I want to look at this evening is four men who repented, four men who had begun to follow Jesus as their Lord and as their King.

So let's again just step through the story, the testimony of Simon and Andrew and James and John as they begin to follow Jesus.

And as we see their progress, as we see what they do, let's be asking ourselves, have we repented? Because maybe there's somebody here tonight who's never yet repented.

Maybe there's somebody here tonight who's never yet begun to follow Jesus. And if that's the case, even in the verses that are before us, there is that call to come.

The first point this evening is the initiative of Jesus. I've got four points, I think it is, four points, maybe five depending on how time goes.

[4 : 0 6] And they all begin with a letter I. I'm not murder Campbell, but I'm trying to be just for one evening. So the first point is the initiative of Jesus.

And it says in verse 18, while walking by the sea of Galilee, he that sees us saw two brothers. And then as we see the next encounter, verse 21, it says, I'm going on from there, he saw two other brothers.

And so as we think about this whole encounter, as we think about the way this story begins, the story begins, the account begins with Jesus.

And of course, this is the testimony of Simon and Andrew and James and John. If they were asked to come and preach in Carlyle, we are asked at the end, unexpectedly, can you share a few words of testimony, they'd be going back to this day.

This is their testimony. But the thing to note is that their testimony doesn't begin with them. It begins with Jesus.

[5 : 11] The initiative is with Jesus. We don't read anything about these men being spiritual seekers. We don't read anything about them being on a spiritual pilgrimage.

They hadn't signed up for a Christianity explored class. They don't appear to be seeking Jesus at the moment that he encounters them. But it's very clear that Jesus is seeking them.

Jesus is walking verse 18. And so there's that sense of movement as the account begins. Jesus is purposeful and as stride as he's going along in that day.

He's walking. He's not on Netflix. He's not halfway through a box set of 47 episodes. He's not sitting in a gaming chair, glued to the thing for hour after hour.

He is walking purposefully. I think even small points like that are good for us to note. As we see Jesus, as we see his work ethic, as we see his determination constantly to do his father's will.

[6 : 22] It's a constant challenge to us when we're tempted to be lazy. Jesus wasn't lazy.

Jesus wasn't sitting around endlessly. He's moving here. There's a sense of movement. There's a sense of work. Because as we track him, wherever he's going, he's committed to doing his father's work.

So he's walking verse 18. And he's by the sea of Galilee. He's walking along the shoreline. And that's an important point to note. It's in there for a reason. We'll come to it.

And verse 18 says he saw two brothers. And verse 21, he saw two other brothers. And the word for saw there in the Greek, I'm not a Greek scholar.

Thomas is much more of a linguist than I am. But the word for saw in the Greek means that he stared. He discerned.

[7 : 21] He recognized. It's not that he was walking along. And these characters just happened to catch his eye.

Now he was looking for them. And having seen them, he approaches them. And it's an amazing scene when we consider it.

When we just hit pause and think about what's going on here. Because what we're reading here, and what we can see in our mind's eye is God the Son.

The second person of the Trinity. We're seeing the one, we're seeing the King of Kings. We're seeing the Lord of Lords. We're seeing the one who made heaven and earth.

We're seeing the one who holds everything together. We're seeing the one here to whom all authority belongs.

[8 : 22] And he takes the initiative. And he seeks these four flawed characters. These two sets of brothers.

The initiative is all with Jesus. That's the way it was back then. And that's the way it still is tonight. We're here tonight in this place. Not because we seek after God. Romans 3 makes clear no one seeks after God.

Because of our sinful, dead state. We are here tonight in this place. We have become aware of Jesus, whether it's tonight or whether it's 40 years ago.

And the reason we're here, and the reason we have an interest in Christ is because He seeks. It's the seeking initiative of Jesus.

[9 : 24] Just as Jesus saw these disciples, as He discerned them, as He stared at them. He sees us.

Just as He approached them, He approaches us. God the Son comes to us in the Word, the living Word.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, He takes the initiative. And He comes to us.

And that should blow us away with a sense of wonder. That should overwhelm us as we think about the privilege that we have.

And the opportunity that we have. That God the Son, that Jesus, even tonight, that would come to us.

[10 : 25] That He would look at us. That He would speak to us. That He would call us to come to Him. Don't waste the opportunity.

As we sang in the Psalm, don't harden your heart. The initiative of Jesus. The second thing we can see here is the identity of the disciples.

Verse 18 and verse 21, again, we're given just a few details. Nothing much, but we're given just a wee bit about the disciples. Verse 18, Jesus saw two brothers, Simon, who's called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net down to the sea, for they were fishermen.

We're told that they've been in Galilee. That's what they're fishing out of. And verse 21, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother in the boat with Zebedee, their father, mending their nets.

So there's four things that we can see here that are descriptive of these men, and there are points that can give us encouragement tonight, and there are also points that can perhaps be a challenge to us.

[11:42] And the first thing to see in terms of the identity of these disciples is they were from the country. So Jesus is looking for disciples.

He's looking for apprentices. He's looking for people that he can call to serve them. He's looking for leaders.

Now, when we look for leaders in terms of the world, whether it's in business or politics or entertainment, where do we go to find leaders?

We go off to London. We go off to Paris. We go off to New York. We go off to the cities. We go to the elite universities. We go to the places where the action is.

That's where we'll find the standout candidates, we would say. But not Jesus. When he looks for disciples, he doesn't go to an important city like Jerusalem.

[12:45] He takes a walk along the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee. Like in Duncan, the commentator says, Jesus met them in Galilee, not in Jerusalem, not in the court of Herod, not in the schools of the rabbis and chief priests and Pharisees and scribes.

He found them in Galilee in obscurity. Christ sees not as man sees.

So these disciples, the first thing we can see here in terms of their identities, they're from the country, they're fishermen.

The second thing we can see here about the disciples is they were ordinary men. They weren't extraordinary standout students. They weren't those who were recognized as men of great gravitas and status.

They were just ordinary men. And these are the people that Jesus calls to become His disciples. And that was something that was entirely counter-cultural.

[13:51] Because back in the time where Jesus is walking, it was extremely difficult to become a rabbi. It was extremely difficult, sorry, to become a disciple of a rabbi in the first place.

And one commentator just gives a bit of an insight into how one becomes a rabbi. And here's just a couple of paragraphs from this commentator.

He says by the age of 12 or 13, the ones at the back there, the young ones at the back in the wee corner, how old are you? How old are the young ones over there?

How old are you? Yeah. You're 10. And how about your friend that's trying to hide down there in the floorboards as he's coughing away. And what's your, what's your rum age?

12. So listen to this. Listen to this. I don't know how much of the Bible you know. But back at the time when Jesus was walking on the shore that day, this is what was required for somebody to become a disciple.

[15:00] By age 12 or 13, most kids would have the entire Torah. That's Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, memorized.

And at that point, most students, the commentator says, the vast majority of students, they went home. So they, they memorized Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, and then they were, they were done with their education.

I wouldn't have even got halfway through there, I don't think. But he says the best and the brightest would go on to a second level of education. By the age of 17, they would have memorized the entire Old Testament.

That's stage two, trying to become a disciple. Now, at this point says the commentator, the overwhelming majority were done. But the best of the best of the best would apply to apprentice under a rabbi.

So these were the rules. That was the, the kind of track for discipleship. And then the commentator says, Simon and Andrew were fishermen.

[16:12] This means they didn't make it into an apprenticeship program. They weren't the best of the best of the best. They were the ones who got sent home to make babies and pray that their sons become rabbis.

That Jesus invited them to become his apprentices, his disciples.

Ordinary men from the country. And these are the ones that Jesus saw, he discerned, he approached, he called.

And there's encouragement there for us. We might say, Jesus would never call me to follow him. Maybe there's somebody here who's sitting here tonight saying, Jesus would never call me. Because I've got so little to offer.

I'm so ordinary. What can I do? And yet Jesus calls the ordinary. He calls people like us.

[17:16] And he calls us to trust him. He calls us to profess that our faith is in him. He calls us to come to his table.

He calls us to serve him. And there's encouragement there as we think about the identity of these disciples. There's also challenge.

Because we can see here that they were family men. And they were busy men. So let's think about that for a moment. John and Andrew, they were brothers.

They were part of a family unit. James and John were told they're the sons of Zebedee. And they clearly had responsibilities in the family business.

So life was complicated. Life was busy. Following Jesus for these men was going to mean inconvenience. It was going to mean hassle within the family. It was going to mean probable tension, disruption.

[18:13] But Jesus still called them. Busy men. But Jesus says, no, I want you to follow me. And busy men.

Because when Jesus approaches them, when he sees them, they're working. Now, when you and I see somebody, if we want to have a conversation and we can see that somebody's halfway through a job we're working, we tend to say, I'm sorry to bother you.

I'll tell you what, I'll come back later when you've finished your job. But for Jesus, he sees Simon and Andrew and in verse 18, because he their midcast, they're throwing out their nets.

And James and John are in the middle of mending their nets. But Jesus didn't wait for any of them to finish their work. Mid-task. He calls them to follow him.

And for some here, probably for most here. Family life is demanding. At work is always busy.

[19:16] And yet Jesus doesn't say to you and he doesn't say to me, I'm sorry to bother you. I hope I'm not inconveniencing you. Rather what he says is, I am the Lord.

I am your King. And I'm looking at you. And I know your identity. And I know your situation. And I know how busy you are.

But I'm calling you to follow me. The identity of the disciples, the initiative of Jesus, thirdly, the call of Jesus was a call to intimacy.

So intimacy with Jesus is the third point. And we see that just in the simplicity of the call in verse 19, and he said to them, follow me.

And just the striking direct simplicity of it is stunning. Jesus just says to them, follow me. Now if all we had was Matthew, we might think this is a bit abrupt, but Matthew is summarizing.

[20:27] There's a bigger picture here. And commentator Ligon Duncan says, in this passage, we see the call of the first four disciples. Jesus had known them for about a year.

Jesus had known them for about a year. We know that from our reading of John chapter one. But in this passage, he issues them a special call. So what kind of a special call was this?

Well, it was a call to follow. And it was a call to follow Jesus, not at a distance, but intimately.

This was a call as a mark records it in Mark chapter three verse 14, to be with Jesus.

And that's what it means to be a Christian. It's to be with Jesus. Think about the the verses that are so familiar to us in Matthew 11.

[21:28] Jesus says, come to me. All who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

For I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. I wonder if I can ask the question tonight of of you.

Have you come to Jesus yet? It's a really simple question. And it's a question for the young ones at the back. It's a question for the old ones at the front.

Have you come to Jesus yet? Have you asked him for forgiveness? For your sin?

Have you come to know that that intimacy with Jesus and that rest that he offers and he gives that we can't find any other place?

[22 : 39] Are you with Jesus? Or are we still apart from him? And if we're with Jesus, are we willing to profess that?

Because I'm guessing even from the prayer that there are probably people here who are with Jesus who may have been with Jesus for years.

And yet you've never come to sit at His table. You never profess that you're with Him. And if that's the case, your call, your invitation, the command of Jesus is to come.

Come to His table. Come to that place where you can be with Him, with His people. To remember His death. To profess that your faith is in Him.

That His blood has cleansed your heart. You think about the table back at the time of writing.

[23 : 53] People sat around the table for hours. We tend to sit around the table if we even have a table for about five minutes. You're woofing down your dinner and you're running out the door to do whatever is next on the agenda.

Back at the time of writing that the table was a place where people, they enjoyed friendship and fellowship. It was a place of intimacy. It was a place where people came to eat and to laugh and to cry and to share life together.

And the Lord's table is a place where we go to do the same. It's the place that we go to profess that we are with Jesus.

It's the place that we go to cry. It's rarely that you take a communion where you don't see those who are struggling with tears.

We cry. As we examine ourselves, we do see our sin.

[25 : 07] As we think about the cross, we see what our sin did to Jesus. And yet as we see the cross, we give thanks at the table. And we remember that His death was for us.

And at the table we rejoice, we smile. We're filled with joy as we think of the resurrection.

Every time we take the bread and we take the wine, we do this, we say each time until He comes. We remember He is risen.

We remember that He's promised that He will return for us. And so there's joy at the table, there is intimacy that we experience with Jesus. There's intimacy that we experience with each other if we are in Christ.

And we experience it in a special way as we come to the Lord's table. There's intimacy with Jesus.

[26 : 12] That was the call that Jesus placed upon the disciples back then. It's the call, it's the invitation that comes to us again this evening.

It's to be close with Jesus. It's to be intimate with Him. The fourth point is the intention of Jesus. Jesus says to these disciples, He sees them, He calls them and He expresses His intention for them. He says, I will make you verse 19, fishes of men.

Sometimes we think that when we repent, when we're converted that we've made it. You know, we're over the line. And in a sense we are over the line, but we're not over the finish line, we're just over the start line.

It's one of the things that we should remember when we pray for people. We pray for people to be converted. We pray for people to repent. And when they repent, we rejoice, but we shouldn't stop praying for them.

[27 : 22] Because they're only at the start, not at the end. And Jesus, He calls these men to come, they follow Him, and Jesus has plans for these men, they're going to work for Him, they're going to serve Him, they're going to be His ambassadors, they're going to be His preachers, they're going to be His disciples.

And in a sense we all have that calling. We're saved by grace as Ephesians 2 verses 8 and 9, but we're saved for good works as Ephesians 2 verse 10.

And God has prepared these good works in advance for us to do. And Jesus had prepared good works for these men to do.

Peter and James and John and Andrew, it seems that they had already met Jesus, perhaps they were already trusting Jesus, but now Jesus says, I have a special mission for you.

I'm calling you to leave everything and follow me. And I do wonder whether that might be a call that is coming to someone here to do the same.

[28 : 34] Sometimes Jesus calls us to leave our boats. Sometimes Jesus calls us to leave our families, and everything that's familiar, sometimes Jesus calls us to go into the full-time ministry.

I was in meetings this week for a while where it was recognized that there are very few in Scotland, a president who are going into ministry.

And yet Scotland is darker than it's ever been it seems. And so we have to ask the question, are very few people going into ministry because Jesus isn't calling, or because we're not going.

Jesus called Peter and James and John and Andrew to be fishers of men. Can you imagine the disciples at square one on that day just looking at each other as they heard that, just bewildered, fishers of men.

You know, what does that even mean? How do we do that? It must have seemed so overwhelming back then, and to be frank, it's still dust today.

[29 : 54] There's so many people who are lost. I guess even as we think around the villages that we've come from, we can think of a few people who gather in the church building, but we can think of hundreds who stand around the football pitch.

We can think of hundreds that we rub shoulders with week by week, and as far as we know they're lost, they have no interest in Jesus. So how do we reach them?

And the answer is very simple. The answer is we follow Jesus. That was the answer, that was the reamour that was given to Andrew and James and John and Simon.

Jesus just said, follow me. I will make you fishers of men. Christ the commentator says Jesus did not challenge them to become fishers of men by a series of techniques they could learn, or methods they could follow, but took upon himself the responsibility to make you fishers of men.

This was to be his business. So our business, if we want to be fruitful, if we want to be useful, if we want to be involved in this fishing for men and for women and for boys and for girls, the thing that we are called to do is trust Jesus and follow Jesus, and day by day stay close to Jesus.

[31 : 37] I was thinking back over the last year or two, and I was thinking through my mind, what's the best example, who's the best example of a fisher for men that I've seen in action over the last couple of years?

My mind went to an old lady called Ina, and Ina is now in glory, but at the time that my mind went to, she was in hospital.

She didn't have a caller, she wasn't a minister, she didn't have a pulpit, she didn't have a platform, she had very little strength, she had no mobility.

She was confined to a hospital bed, but through the years and right to the end, she was following Jesus, and Jesus made her in a remarkable way in the hospital ward, an extraordinary fisher of men, because everybody that came into the ward heard about Jesus, and all these nurses and these doctors, all remarked on the brightness of this woman, as she spoke to them about Jesus.

So the challenge and the question for you and I is are we still following Jesus closely? Maybe we began to follow years ago, but are we still following Jesus closely?

[33 : 30] Because that's what our effectiveness is determined, if we are to be fishers of men, we must be continually, day by day, following Jesus in the word, in prayer, in His presence.

The intention of Jesus was to make these disciples fishers of men, and the final thing very, very briefly is just note the immediate response of these men to Jesus.

Verse 20, immediately they left their nets and followed Him. Verse 22, immediately they left their boat and their father and followed Him.

Just put yourself in the shoes of these disciples, Jesus had just called them to leave everything, and follow Him.

And He didn't give them a three-year plan, He didn't say let me just step you through the different stages so you know what you're getting involved with.

[34 : 48] He didn't ask them if we were okay with all the steps and the movement and the conflict and the hassle, the unpredictability.

He didn't do a positive sales pitch, He just said follow me. Leave your boats, put down your nets. Leave your father today.

Zebrae was a rich man by the way. He had people who could help him, he wasn't left high and dry. And to James and John, Jesus said just follow me.

And it was a massively big decision. It was a life-changing decision. It was a costly decision. It was a disruptive decision.

And it took them all of no time at all to respond. They just follow.

[35 : 50] And their whole lives changed direction in that moment as they turned away from a life without Jesus and turned in faith to Him as they followed Him.

And it's a picture of repentance. It's a picture of what it looks like to trust Jesus as Lord and King. Spurgeon says they come straight away. They come at all cost. They come without a question. They come to quit old haunts. They come to follow their leader without stipulation or reserve. They followed. So that's what they did. There's an immediate response to Jesus. And the question we finish tonight with is what about you and what about me?

[36 : 55] Will we follow Jesus? Will we begin tonight maybe to follow Jesus?

Are we still following Jesus? If we began 20 years ago, we're still close with Him. We're still filled with that zeal and that desire to be fishers for Him.

Are we following Jesus? It's costly. It's not costly. We're not following closely likely. Sometimes it's terrifying.

It's absolutely unpredictable. But it's what we're here for. It's what we were made for.

And there's no more exciting, thrilling, purposeful, joyful, satisfying life than to spend our days following Jesus.

[38 : 03] For every day I have on earth, it says, is given by the King. So I will give my life, my all to love and follow Him.

That's what we're going to sing. But is that what we're going to do? Let's pray.