

FISHERS OF MEN
Mark 1:16-20

We are in Mark 1:16-20 today. As you're turning there, I'll remind you of our context. Jesus has just begun His ministry. He has been baptized and tested in the wilderness and shortly after John the Baptist's is arrested and when that happens, Jesus withdraws into the northern territory of Israel called Galilee and He begins to preach. So He didn't begin His ministry in the religious epicenter of Judea and Jerusalem, but up north in Galilee where He calls some of hard-working fisherman as His disciples.

“And as He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fisherman. And Jesus said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.” (*emphasis mine*)

Whenever I read this text, and I have read it often because I was once assigned to preach on this text years ago, the first word I think of is **radical**. Jesus says, “Follow Me,” and they all just drop everything and follow Him. It's all pretty radical isn't it? For these men to just drop their nets and follow Jesus? And I think that's the **intention of Mark in writing this – to show this radical nature and call to discipleship**. Remember, he is writing to believers who are living in Rome and are being persecuted for their faith in Christ. **Lives are on the line and livelihoods are at stake. And the pastoral heart of Mark behind this writing this gospel is to encourage them to follow Christ no matter the cost.** And the example of the disciples here who did that, not only encourage those believers in ancient Rome but also believers today who also sense the call to drop their nets and follow Jesus wherever He calls them. The 12 disciples, in following Jesus knew they weren't just going for a short stroll on the beach. They were leaving everything behind and their following Jesus would eventually take them all around the world as they took the gospel as far as they could to as many as they could by the grace of God.

And there's plenty of **Scriptural** examples and **historical** examples of others we could point to, men and women who did the same. I think of **Isaiah**, who has this vision of God where He becomes aware of God's holiness and aware of his own sin, but then realizes God's incredible grace and forgiveness of his sin and the next thing he says is, “Send me!” God says, “Who will go for Us [Trinity]? Who will preach?” and Isaiah says, “Send me!” “Here I am, Lord!” And then God says, “Go” (Is. 6). Another, a more modern example would be **William Carey**, the well-known British missionary to India who left everything behind to go and tell others about Christ. William Carey knew Christ and knew there was something greater to live for. He said things like, “I'm not afraid of failure; I'm afraid of succeeding at things that don't matter.” Like Isaiah, he met God in a personal way through faith in Jesus Christ and all He really became concerned about was the things of God. That no matter what he did, it would matter for eternity. That became his priority. He had experienced the spiritual life, the new birth through faith in Christ and couldn't not tell others. And as believers today, we should have the same attitude because the joy and reward of knowing Christ is so great, and the consequences of not knowing Christ is also so great.

But how do you get to this point? How do you get to this point where you're willing to forsake everything to follow Christ like this? Where you're someone who is willing to follow Christ no matter the cost? To set your own agenda aside and start operating with a new mission in everything you do? That's what we want

to talk about today. And we're going to look at it in three steps, or **three stones**, since we're talking about being fishers of men. You know, fishermen often have to jump from stone to stone to stone to get to where they want to be to cast a line. If you go fishing for walleye right now on at the Lake McConaughy dam you have to jump from stone to get to a fishable spot, so we're going to look at our message as three stones to jump too. Three stones one must cross to become a fisher of men.

I. **THE FIRST STONE: BELIEVING IN JESUS. (Context)**

That's the first step you make. If you want to be a fisher of men, you have to get to know Jesus first. Someone who doesn't know Jesus in the sense that they've believed in Him can't lead others to Him. These men – James, John, Peter and Andrew – had without a doubt, gotten to know Jesus through His preaching in their area. They had already believed in Him as the Messiah. As radical as it is, it isn't the first time that they have seen Him or heard Him or took interest in Him. They were clearly aware of who He was and what He had been teaching and what He had been doing. They have already spent some personal time with Him. The gospel of John records where and when a few of them first met Him.

John chapter 1 records this account where John the Baptist sees Jesus walking by about a year prior and says, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" and when he said this, two of John's disciples were there standing with him, and one of them was **Andrew**, Simon Peter's brother (one of the men from our text)(Jn. 1:40). So Andrew goes with Jesus and stays with Him and after one day of spending time with Jesus (Jn. 1:39), he is so convinced that He is the Christ that he goes and tells his brother **Peter**, "We have found the Messiah" and then they both returned to Jesus. It also seems that an unnamed disciple who was with them was the apostle **John**. So these men already believed Jesus was the Messiah. They met Jesus earlier, believed in Him, and went back to fishing. But now, John is arrested and Jesus is ready to begin ministry, and He is calling them to follow Him. Jesus knew them and they knew Jesus. And that's just it...

Before you ever step out to follow Jesus, first you just have to know Him – to have simply received Him as your sin-bearer. One of the most frustrating things today that keeps men from truly following Christ is the religious lures that Satan specializes in – he would have men trying to follow Christ through a bunch of religious works without even really just knowing Jesus first. There's a lot of religious people out there who are busy doing religious things, but they don't really have a trust-relationship with Christ. Satan is a fisher of men too, you know. He has all sorts of religious lures out there that are very appealing to men – he has a tackle box of full of religious works lures that he uses to try to get men to work for salvation rather than simply trusting Christ as their Savior. One of things we have to remember is that though we are emphasizing the need to follow Jesus today, we aren't saved by how much or how good we follow Him. We are saved by simply believing in Him. We don't serve God so that we can be saved. We serve God because He has saved us.

In Matthew 7, a text worth referencing often, Jesus tells us of people who, when they meet Him face to face when they die, will start to brag about all of the mighty works they've done in Jesus' name – "We've prophesied and cast out demons and performed miracles in Your name!" I don't know about you, but I've never done any of those things and that's pretty impressive right? Surely, that would count for something in God's eyes for justification? Or surely that's proof that they're saved? But what does Jesus say? He says, "Depart from me, I never knew you." Remember you can do religious things and miraculous things but never really just trust in Jesus as your Savior. Judas is the prime example of that. He went around with the other disciples, preaching and teaching

and casting out demons and he even followed Jesus around for three years – but he never really just had Jesus, did he? He had his hands on the money bag more than he did Jesus.

You cannot jump to the stone of following Jesus in servant ministry without crossing the stone of simple belief first. You need to understand that He died for your sins and that by free grace (it's a gift), when you trust Him as your Savior, your sins are forgiven. Only then can you really begin to serve Him. Listen to Ephesians 2:8-10. This verse alone explains the difference between authentic Christianity and all the false fishing lures in the world – “For it is **by grace** you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the **gift** of God – **not by works**, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in beforehand that we should walk in them.” You see, if you try and earn heaven by good works or religious works, you'll never get to heaven. You won't know true spiritual life. But if you just trust Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you'll know this life and He'll begin to use you.

In a world where Satan has many deceptive lures, it's like someone once said: “Sometimes getting a clear view of Jesus is the greatest challenge to following Him.” If you want to follow Jesus, you need to get a clear view of Jesus. When you get passed the religious facades, and really get a clear view of Jesus with a deep, personal, real, living relationship with God – where you're abiding in Him and His Word and in prayer, He'll call you in His timing. And you won't necessarily have to do it against your own will because when you get to know Him, much of your own passions and desires and dreams change – like Isaiah and William Carey. You stop living for yourself or running your business for yourself and working just to get by – you start living and doing everything for Him. You become a fisher of men because you can't keep Him to yourself. You want to tell others about this awesome Savior you've come to know! When you get past so much of the religiosity and get a clear view of God like this, and His purposes for the present, it destroys your consumer mentality. You stop going to church only to get (and it is important to go and grow and get knowledge) but there should come a point where you start giving. You stop only asking, “What's in it for me?” and instead start asking, “How has God gifted me and how does God want me to spend myself? How can I serve?” And that's basically the second stone we're going to talk about .

II. **THE SECOND STONE: FOLLOWING JESUS (V. 17)**

In verse 17, Jesus said, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” That's a three-part statement that I want to break down for our second stone: 1) Follow Me 2) I will make you to become. And 3) fishers of men.

A. **Part 3 – “Fisher of Men.”**

First I want to look at part 3 – the goal – to become a fisher of men. And that's really a neat metaphor with so much meaning to it.

Relevancy

For **one**, I think Jesus is being **relevant** with them – because they were fishermen and all. They get that. They understand that, obviously, because they are fishermen. I think to the fire fighter He might have said something like, “I will teach you to snatch others from fire!” (Jude 1:23) Or to the farmers, “I'll teach put your hand to the plow and not look back” (Lk. 9:62). To the rancher He might say, “Hold back those who are staggering towards the slaughter” (Prob. 24:11). Fishing was something the understood.

Commonality

But **secondly**, Jesus probably wasn't the first person to say this. It was a pretty **common concept** in their day. Wiersbe said it was used of philosophers and other teachers who would 'capture men's mind's' through teaching and persuasion. They would bait the hook with their teaching and catch disciples.¹ Based on that common practice, they knew that Jesus was calling for total allegiance. Again, they understood they weren't just taking a stroll on the beach for a day. The contrast though between Jesus and the other teachers around was that instead of a student picking which rabbi or teacher to follow, this Rabbi chose the student.

Urgency/Importance

Thirdly, the figure of fishing for men speaks of **urgency** and **importance**. Biblically speaking, God Himself has been portrayed in the OT as a fisher of men, always in a context of divine judgment.

- Amos 4:2 says, "The Lord God has sworn by His holiness, 'Behold the days are coming upon you, when they will take you away with meat hooks, and the last of you with fish hooks.'" God was angry with the calloused, religious hearts in Israel and was going to use another nation to come and get them as though by hooks. That's what it's like in divine judgment time – you can't escape and will be taken away to judgment like a fish on a steel-braided line.
- Jeremiah 16:16, speaking of the Israelites judgment by Babylon, says, "Behold, I am going to send for many fisherman,' declares the Lord, 'and they will fish for them,'"
- Ezekiel 38:4 prophecies about how in a future battle over the state of Israel, probably during the Tribulation period, God is going to put hooks into the jaws of these unbelieving nations who have rejected Him for so long and have oppressed the Israelites, He's going to bring them against His people [Jewish, Hebrew Israel] and His land – they'll be thinking they will plunder Israel but God is going to destroy them so that He can make it clear to the entire world that He is God. It says He will be sanctified and glorified through their judgment (38:16; 39:13, 21). "I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws and I will bring you out, and all your army..." It's going to take Israel 7 months to clean up after this battle and 7 years to burn all of the wooden clubs and spears from these armies in their fireplaces. The death and destruction is so great that they will erect a town called Hamonah (*meaning multitude*) for the workers who clean up the land.
- In Ezekiel 29:4-5 God fishes Egypt, Israel's enemy, out of her territory just to leave her on dry land like a fish out of water so that the birds and beasts can devour. "I will put hooks in your jaws...and I will bring you up out of the midst of your rivers...and I will abandon you to the wilderness, you and all the fish of your rivers. You will fall on the open field."

So in the OT, the fishing of God is a fishing for the wicked or unbelieving or disobedient to take them to judgment. I think there's a lot of judgment wrapped up in this fishing metaphor. But **the fishing that Jesus is talking about here is a fishing out of judgment**. He wants men to fish other men out of God's judgement and that's part of the reason I think they were so quick to drop everything – John was warning them earlier to flee the coming wrath – they understood the urgency of divine judgment.

The sea is a good picture of what it's like to be in a state of unbelief. The sea is a cold and dark place – a place where you are slave to the powerful current of sin that tosses you back and forth,

never ceasing to rest and always stirring up muddy refuse. And when you fish for men, you're pulling people up and out of this dark, cold powerful current of sin and into light of the Son (with a capital 's', Son). Christ is the life-preserver we throw to men drowning in their sin. One man said Jesus would be training the disciples, "to cast the net of divine truth into the sea of the world, and to land on the shores of the divine kingdom a great multitude of believing souls."² So it speaks of urgency.

Technique

Lastly, fishing for men also speaks of technique. **It's fishing, not catching.** I went out fishing twice last week and mostly fished – there wasn't a lot of catching. And that's something that really characterizes our age. I'm really optimistic God is using this coronavirus situation to draw men to Himself but even Paul warned that in the last days not to expect great revivals, but apostasy – just before our departure in the Rapture, there is a departure from truth. It won't be a state where everything's getting better and better and the world more and more Christianized like Kingdom-Now or Amillennial theology suggests. Apostasy should be expected. **Also, not all fish are the same.** So it gives us a picture of how ministry might look. You have to switch their tactics now and then. If trolling isn't working, you might try jigging or sitting still and bobber fishing. There's a lot of different fishing techniques and a lot of different ministries. Our lure is always & only Christ only the gospel but you don't share the gospel the same way every time, right? You don't have to share the bridge illustration or the four spiritual laws every time you witness to someone. Sometimes it might just be verse or two. You get a feel for where folks are at and can steer the conversation in a spiritual direction (i.e. At a well, Jesus made reference of living water).

Let's look at the first part – the invitation now.

B. Part 1 – “Follow Me”

If these disciples were going to follow Jesus, it meant that they had live for something new. That's the nature of discipleship. It's joining oneself to Jesus in total allegiance with mission work in mind.³ If you want to take being a fisher of men seriously, you don't just keep going on with life the way you have been – what I mean by that is not that you have to quit your job and become a missionary somewhere, unless He calls you to do that obviously – you might have to lay aside some things like a certain lifestyle you've been living – but what I mean by that is that you start speaking with a purpose, acting with a purpose; in everything you have been doing, you now start doing it for the glory of God. You make a decision that no matter what I do, I'm going to live for Christ and I'm going to position myself to grow in Christ so I can follow well. It is your number one priority.

In Luke 14:26 Jesus says, “If anyone comes to Me, and does not **hate** his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, *even his own life*, he cannot be My disciple.” I could be wrong, but to me it seems like this wasn't a problem for them. After hearing the testimony of John the Baptist concerning Jesus, after having spent some time under His teaching, after having heard Him prophetically tell Nathanael that He saw him under the fig tree before Philip called him, after all these things, everything else had to have lost its appeal in light of Jesus. And that's the hatred He is talking about. **It's not actual, but comparative.** Everything else should look like you hate it in comparison to your devotion to Christ – even your own life.

And it's worth noting that this type of surrender is driven by grace – not by a whip like religion does. **It's driven by a comprehension of all that Christ is! A comprehension of Him who is grace!** It's grace that teaches us to live righteously isn't it. It's His grace that draws us to follow

Him. Paul said in Romans 12:1-2 that **it is in view of God’s mercies in Christ that we offer our lives a holy and living sacrifice**. It’s in view of God’s incredible mercy on you and His grace towards you that you come to this point where you say, “Here I am, Lord. Use me. I’m done living for myself and I want to live for You.” You do it out of love and a desire to know Him more.

C. Third Part – “I will make you become”

You could literally translate the second part of Jesus’ command, “I will make you *to become* fishers of men.” In other words, these fishermen were going to have to *learn* a new type of fishing. It doesn’t happen overnight. It’s a process of learning. **Real fishing also requires learning as well. Just the other day, one of the young men I’ve disciplined more than anyone I ran into the other day at the park casting a fly-rod in the grass. He wants to learn to fly fish and it required knowledge of watching videos, learning from others and practicing. Looking back, I can remember my uncle Tom teaching me to fish points and drop off’s in a boat. I can remember my dad’s friend Pat teaching me how to use a slip-bobber – I think we caught every Bluegill in our pond that day! A couple of high school friends taught me how to ice fish using tip-ups. But to learn from them, I had to go fishing with them. I had to be with them to learn from them. It was the same with the disciples. To learn to fish for men, they had to walk with Jesus every day and learn from Him. That’s what’s awesome about fishing in the Christian life: you’re never alone. You’re fishing with Jesus!**

The third and final stone is what I’ve called risking for Jesus.

III. THE THIRD STONE: RISKING FOR JESUS.

Verse 18 says, “Immediately, they left their nets and followed Him.”

Verse 20 says, “Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.”

These men left their family behind, their friends behind, their home behind, the family business behind (btw their dad had hired servants so they weren’t being irresponsible – their dad was probably for it), left a steady paycheck behind. Fishing in Galilee was a privileged place to fish! Historian Josephus basically said Galilee was a sweet place for fisherman and they exported fish from there to all over. But **dropping these nets meant risking all that**. And sometimes it’s just right to risk for Jesus. Following Jesus is not always easy. Sometimes it means less comfort, less security, more stress, more trouble, more danger.

Again, think of the original hearers. Mark wanted the early Christians undergoing the persecutions of Nero to risk their lives in obedience to Christ even unto death – because the risk wasn’t strange to Jesus or the disciples. They needed to be reminded that Jesus does call men to follow Him and sometimes it is difficult. And maybe we need to hear that too in our plush country of comfort – which is by the way, getting less comfortable all the time for Christians. The gray area is disappearing in our society because it’s no longer convenient to be a Christian. Nominal Christians becoming “None’s” (non-religious) which means the contrast between light and dark is more and more prevalent. To be a disciple in this world at times could cost you: a job, a reputation, a friendship, maybe even freedom. **But it’s still worth it. And in light of eternity it’s not only just worth it, it’s the only logical thing to do!** The disciples who followed Christ experienced many hardships in their life (just read Paul’s resume in 2 Corinthians 11) but you better believe that they would do it all over again in a heartbeat.

Think of what the apostles would've missed out on if they hadn't followed Jesus: I mean, seeing men and women healed; seeing people raised from the dead; **the power of the gospel transforming lives**; the transfiguration; the resurrection; to be a part of forming the very foundation of His church and **the reward** of eternity and having their names inscribed on the 12 foundation stones of the New Jerusalem; the greatest reward was probably just seeing God use them as a channel for Him to work through! Not one of them would tell you today that the risk wasn't worth it for Him! They might even say, I wish I would've risked more!

If we are going to be good fisherman for Jesus we must cross the stone of **trusting in Jesus** (having & developing a close relationship with Him in grace), cross the stone of **following Jesus** (making the decision to live for Him) and cross the stone of **risking for Jesus**. Don't get stuck being content on the first stone. There's a lot of people out there who I know really believe but they aren't following, and they'll regret it as soon as they meet Him. Don't be the one who shrinks away in shame at His coming because you failed to follow Christ (1 Jn. 2:28). We can also get stuck in some sort of lukewarm Christianity on the second stone – a mindset that says, I'll obey until it costs me something, like a reputation or my entitlement to a certain attraction in my life. These disciples crossed all of these stones. They became fools for Christ. But they had to make the decision to drop their nets before they could actually do it.

And so the question I leave you with this morning: **“What nets are you still holding on to that might be keeping you from following Jesus? Which nets need to be let go of?”**

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2007), 92.

² A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, pp. 12-13.

³ Constable's Notes, www.planobiblechapel.org, accessed 21 April 2020.