

## Section 9

## JESUS CALLS FOUR FISHERMEN

(Parallels: Mark 1:16-21; Luke 5:1-11)

TEXT: 4:18-22

18. And walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brethren, Simon who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers.
19. And he saith unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men.
20. And they straightway left the nets, and followed him.
21. And going on from thence he saw two other brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.
22. And they straightway left the boat and their father, and followed him.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How long do you suppose these four fishermen had known Jesus before He called them to be fishermen of men?
- b. What does Jesus mean by calling them to be "fishers of men"? What does He want them to do in that capacity?
- c. Why do you think Matthew emphasizes the immediacy of their response? ("straightway" of verses 20 and 22)
- d. How are the families of these working men to be supported if these four bread-winners leave their occupations to follow this itinerate rabbi over the countryside? Very likely, someone asked this question that day. How would you answer it?
- e. Vigorous efforts are being made to enlist the most capable young men for hundreds of promising vocations. Such efforts and the procedures used are generally approved or at least expected by the parents of these young men. Yet, when efforts are made to encourage these same young people to enlist themselves in the Christian ministry, their parents sometimes object strenuously to the "pressure" being put on their children. What is your reaction to the problem?

f. Apparently, Zebedee made no effort to hinder his sons' entering the discipleship of Jesus. What kind of man does this seem to indicate him to have been?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

One morning while Jesus was walking beside the Lake of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother, Andrew, throwing their cast-net into the sea, for fishing was their occupation.

On this same day, the people were crowding closely around Jesus to hear God's message. As He stood on the shore, He noticed that the fishermen had given up their fishing and had beached their boats, leaving them there while they washed their nets. Jesus boarded Simon's boat and asked him to push off a little from the shore. Then Jesus sat down and continued His teaching the crowds from His seat in the boat.

When He had finished speaking, He addressed Simon, "Put out into deep water and all of you let down your nets for a catch."

But Simon argued, "But, Sir, we have been hard at work all night and caught nothing at all. But if you say so, I will lower the nets."

They did so and caught an enormous shoal of fish—so big that the nets began to break! So they signalled to their fellows in the other boat to come and help them. This they did, loading both boats so full of fish that they rode so low in the water that they almost sank. When Peter saw what had happened, he threw himself down at Jesus' knees, exclaiming, "Master, leave me, for I'm a sinful man!" For Peter and his companions, James and John, Zebedee's sons who were Simon's partners, were staggered at the haul of fish which they had taken. Jesus replied to Simon, "Do not be afraid, Simon. From now on your catch will be *men*."

So they brought the boats to shore at different parts of the beach. As Jesus stepped from Peter's boat, He invited Peter and Andrew, "Follow me and I will teach you how to take men alive!" They left their nets at once and followed Jesus.

Going on up the beach a little further from there, Jesus saw James and John aboard their boat with their father Zebedee, repairing the nets broken in places by the recent catch. Immediately He called them and, just as quickly, they left the boat, their father Zebedee, the hired servants—everything, and followed Him.

## NOTES

## I. THE MEMOIRS OF THE CALL

In the PARAPHRASE/HARMONY it is assumed that the incidents recorded in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-21; Lk. 5:1-11) are basically the same event told from two quite different points of view. A simple comparison of the first two Gospels will indicate very slight variations in wording, whereas Luke describes a miraculous catch of fish, an event which concludes with the call of Peter and several fishermen to leave all to follow Jesus. It is quite possible that what is described in two ways is really two stories of two separate events. Matthew, according to his topical arrangement, places the call of the four fishermen in a general relationship of Jesus' entrance into Galilee; Mark does the same (1:14-20). However, Mark makes the event precede the "busy day of miracles" (1:21-38), whereas Luke (4:31—5:11) lists the call of the fishermen after it. Yet, Luke is not too precise about the time element, although his tendency is to follow chronological sequences. For this latter reason, it might well be asked whether Luke intends to tell the same basic event as the other two. Resolving this question involves letting the witnesses tell their story and our attempting to harmonize the facts they present, without our being able to cross-examine the witnesses. The importance of trying to solve the problem lies in the determination whether we have all the available materials at hand before beginning to interpret the passage, or whether we have too much material, putting together two separate events as if they were one.

There are at least two ways to harmonize the facts, if the story be one told from two viewpoints:

1. First, the call; second, the miraculous catch. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 476) argues for the first view, showing Peter's need for such a demonstration of Jesus' power to make him truly a "fisher of men." Peter heard it all in the boat, as he sat close by, in the shadow of His Majesty. Then, this was the teaching of which he had become a disciple; this, the net and the fishing to which he was just called. How utterly miserable, in one respect, must it have made him. Could such an one as he ever hope, with whatever toil, to be a successful fisher? . . . Presently it shall all be brought to light; not only that it may be made clear, but that, alike, the lesson and the help may be seen.

2. First, the miraculous catch; second, the call of the fishermen. There is good psychological reason for placing the miraculous catch first. In this case, Jesus is pictured as wanting to impress upon the minds of these fishermen the majestic authority of this One with whom they were to serve. In addition, providing them with such a large catch which they, in turn, could sell for no small sum, he could help them to justify their absence from home and business for a time. Further, the force of this miracle would not be lost on the people at home either, for their reluctance to permit these able-bodied bread-winners to forsake their occupation would disappear in the same confidence in Jesus to provide in the future, even as He did on this occasion of their call.

Therefore, the notes which follow take the general view that the Synoptics provide here merely two views of the same event. The sequence of action suggested here is that of the PARAPHRASE/HARMONY. The exact relation of the accounts in Matthew and Mark to that of Luke, however, must remain in doubt, inasmuch as the essentials are tenuous or missing.

## II. THE MEN WHO WERE CALLED

4:18 **Walking by the sea.** Where Jesus has been, cannot be known with surety, due to the chronological problems in harmonizing the accounts. Perhaps this call of the four fishermen is the first intention of Jesus as He returns to Capernaum, from Nazareth; however, His fame precedes Him and a crowd gathers, following Him to the beach. Accordingly, although He saw the fishermen first, He taught the crowd before commanding these men to haul in the miraculous catch. **Sea of Galilee** is only a large lake, being only 6 miles wide by 12 miles long. It has probably been called a number of names by men caught out upon its boiling surface during one of its notoriously sudden, furious storms. The official names, however, have been "Sea of Chinnereth" (Josh. 12:27) probably from a fortified city that stood near its western shore (Josh. 19:35); "Waters of Gennesar" (I Macc. 11:67) or "Lake Gennesaret" (Lk. 5:1) from the small plain on its western side (Mt. 14:34); "Sea of Tiberias" was the name drawn from the prominent city of the NT period, located on its western shore (Jn. 6:1; 21:1). For further description, see on 8:23ff. The waters of this lake teemed with fish, thus providing food and employment for these commercial fishermen.

**He saw two brethren . . . fishers.** But what really did Jesus see? He saw men whose principle distinguishing characteristics were their being UN-distinguished in practically every regard. Any other's eye might not have seen in these men the sterling qualities that Jesus could discern there and later develop:

1. They were accustomed to hardship. Because of their experiences with the hard life, they were well-seasoned men.
2. They were humble men, capable of being taught. Their heads were not completely jammed with rabbinic foolishness to the point they would rather argue than listen and learn from Jesus.
3. They were diligent, working men, not ashamed of honest toil nor seeking the easy life.
4. They were already His disciples. Logically, Jesus sought for apostle-material among those who were already aware of some of His teachings, character and mission. Such a call as He would address to them could not have been made, unless they had something of this understanding. (See on 4:19)

**Casting a net into the sea.** Three modes of fishing are mentioned in the Scriptures:

1. Hook: Mt. 17:27; Job. 41:1, 2
2. Spears: Job 41:7
3. Nets, of which there are two principle types:
  - a. The Cast-net (*amphibléstron*) is a circular net which is thrown out over the water and allowed to settle down in the water, weighted down by lead weights fixed to its perimeter. The fish are thus entrapped in the center under the net as the fishermen tread down the net and draw the bottom edges together. Obviously, such a net would be that used by the men when Jesus first saw them near the beach (Mt. 4:18; Mk. 1:16).
  - b. The Dragnet (*sagéné*) or also (*diktouon*) is a long net, leaded on one edge with floats on the other edge which make it literally "stand up" in the water, producing a fence which fishermen may use to surround a school of fish by extending the net between two boats which bring

it close enough to shore that fishermen may land the catch in the shallows. If the water is deep, the boats can bring the ends slowly together to form a circle. A diver closes the bottom of the net and the entrapped fish are hauled out of the water and loaded into the boats. Jesus ordered the men to lower this net for the great catch. (Lk. 5:2, 4, 5, 6)

- c. The "nets" (Mt. 4:20, 21: *ta diktna*) probably indicates a general expression for all nets of whatever type.

### III. THE MOMENT OF THE CALL

4:19 **And he saith unto them, Come ye after me.** The events which preceded this call and the circumstances in which it was given help to explain both what Jesus meant by what He said, as well as the reaction of the men to whom it was directed:

1. These fishermen had already been personally acquainted with Jesus for at least eight or nine months (Jn. 1-4), having both heard His teaching and seen some miracles.
2. The call came after Jesus' first open break with traditional religious authority and after the beginning of the persecution of Jesus by the Jews (Jn. 2:13-22; 4:1). Thus, Jesus challenged these men to enter into a formal fellowship with Him and His strained rapport with formal Judaism.
3. The miraculous catch of fish is also suggested as preceding this call. Plummer notes (145) that it frequently happens that one experience touches a man, when many similar experiences fail to do so. Yet, without being realized, they prepared the heart for that one experience that changed the man's life. These disciples had already seen some of Jesus' miracles, but this one struck home to them personally. The striking feature about this one was its relation to their daily toil: it was done with their nets and their boats. It is natural that it should make such an impression upon them.

### IV. THE MEANING OF THE CALL

4:19 **Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men.** What did Jesus intend these fishermen to understand by this invitation?

## A. What Jesus did not mean:

1. This is not a call to become His disciples, for that they were already. He is calling them to learn evangelism.
2. This is not a call to worldly glory, for they were still to be, in some way, fishermen. What compensation did He offer them to leave all and follow Him? Apparently, He promised them nothing but the joy of righteousness and the satisfaction of servants of the Messiah. (Cf. Mt. 19:27) Only at the Last Supper did Jesus announce positions of honor in His kingdom in terms that approximated even remotely the language of compensation expected by self-seeking disciples. (Lk. 22:28)
3. Jesus is not causing them to vow never again to touch their nets, for they could certainly, without prejudice to their devoted acceptance of this call, earn a little occasionally at their old work. And they probably went fishing whenever Jesus remained in Capernaum. They still had to eat and support families. (Cf. Jn. 21:1ff)
4. This is not merely a call to learn more doctrine or better practice of already known truth, but a call to begin a completely new life of discipleship on a higher, vaster level than ever before realized in their acquaintance with Jesus.

## B. What Jesus did mean:

1. **Come ye after me.** He wanted these disciples to be with Him! He wanted them to learn His spirit. His message, His ways. They had listened to Him before. They had seen Him in action. Until now they were relatively uncommitted to the movement He represented. But in this moment there came to them this challenge to throw in their lot with Him. Such a call could not come too soon, for these four and others were to be His witnesses. It would be their specific task to give to the world a trustworthy record of the Master's message and deeds. They must represent His character and mirror His spirit accurately. But to do this, their impressions of Him must be formed over long periods and under many, diverse conditions. But their following Jesus must also

mean the habitual abandonment of their former occupations and earthly ties whereinsofar these interfered with their acceptance of this call.

2. **I will make you.** They who become apostles of Jesus are not to be self-made men. He calls them to learn to evangelize by practical experiences, both by watching Jesus and by doing it themselves. Bales (166) quotes Weigle's beautiful description of Jesus' method of teaching:

*"His training of the twelve was by life with them and for them. . . . Not content merely to teach them by word of mouth, He bade them follow Him. He gave Himself to them, and gave them work to do for Him. They went with Him in His journeys; they dwelt constantly in His presence. They helped Him preach His kingdom; they too worked miracles. He even sent them out for themselves, to travel throughout the land teaching and healing. He was preparing them to take His place and to carry on His work; and He prepared them thoroughly. They learned by doing. They caught His spirit by association with Him. Through knowledge, friendship and work He brought them to spiritual maturity . . . He was Himself the Ideal that He sought to teach."*

What sheer, matchless courage Jesus must possess to speak these words to any man! He knew that the next few years would be spent not only in the public eye but under the closest scrutiny of these whom He calls to be His most intimate personal associates. Bales (*ibid.*) cites Stalker's observation:

*"To the Twelve the most valuable part of their connection with Christ was simply the privilege of being with Him—of seeing that marvelous life day by day, and daily receiving the silent, almost unobserved impress of His character. St. John, reflecting on His three year's experience long afterwards, summed it up by saying, 'We beheld His glory!' . . . No eyes are so keen as those of students. If admitted close to a man, they take immediate stock of his resources. They are hero-worshippers when they believe in a professor. but*



their scorn is unmeasured if they disbelieve in him. They can be dazzled by a reputation; but only massiveness of character and thoroughness of attainment can be sure of permanently impressing them."

How desperately they needed that molding which would be provided in the instruction and example of Jesus is best seen by contrasting what they were when Jesus called them with what they must be when He left them to return to the Father. The preachers of the Christian Gospel would have to have greater hearts than narrow, Jewish provincialism, freer consciences than those bound by traditional religion, greater intellectual attainment than that represented by the conventional learning of the day. They must learn to rejoice and triumph in the stumbling-block and foolishness of the cross. They must be willing to bear a cross themselves. But at the moment of their call to service what were they? They were the products of an environment made up of people who ultimately rejected and crucified Jesus. Obviously, they had much to learn and more to unlearn. They, like us, were slow to do both.

But the confidence of Jesus in His words, "I will make you," is contagious! Although there are some who will betray our trust, there are others who would respond to our confidence in them. How much more Jesus would be able to get out of His men simply because He showed them that, for all their weaknesses and failures, He could still trust them to the important task to which He called them! If Peter, for instance, feels the expanse of distance between Christ and himself as "a sinful man," because of a new sense of the Lord's holiness and majesty, he must have heard these confident, comforting words of Jesus as great encouragement to believe that the result of his ministry and life was in the hands of Jesus.

3. **Fishers of men.** Out of these three words grows that magnificent task which forms the book of Acts! He was calling them to the glorious honor of saving souls from death and establishing a Church that would march across the Mediterranean world conquering men's hearts and which would endure to the end of time.

## V. MOBILIZATION TO THE CALL

4:20, 22 **And they straightway left the nets . . . the boat and their father, and followed him.** Did not these stalwart brothers comprehend the implications of this call to their family, friends and acquaintances? Yes, Peter later expresses the clean break that they had made, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you." (Mt. 19:27a) But who would take care of Peter's family in his absence? Possibly a near relative, too old to attempt active campaigning with Jesus, could handle the fishing business well enough to justify the absence of Peter's hands at the nets. Hired servants stepped into the place of James and John (Mk. 1:20).

But, why did they follow Jesus that day? A. B. Bruce (*Training*, 16) rightly denies that these men were either idle, discontent with their former lot, or ambitious:

"Ambition needs a temptation: it does not join a cause which is obscure and struggling, and whose success is doubtful: it strikes when success is assured, and when the movement it patronizes is on the eve of its glorification."

Considering how little they really understood of the nature of the King in whose service they were enrolling themselves, or of the kingdom that they would proclaim, one would say that they were enthusiasts. For the moment, at least until Jesus could teach them better, their heads were pounding with visions of a glorious messianic kingdom about to be set up with Jesus wearing David's crown. These visions, immature and ill-conceived as they might have been, drove them from their families and occupations to go into the service of Jesus. Though it appeared that they left on a fool's errand, yet, with all their misconceptions and ignorance, it was into JESUS' hands that they placed their strength, their influence, their lives. They were just ordinary folk who gave themselves to Him and He can do anything with people like that! What faith to follow the unknown Jesus of Nazareth!

Whatever became of those men and that enthusiastic decision? Look up these passages, for they tell the heart-warming story of their discipleship: *Peter and Andrew*: Mt. 8:14; 10:2; 14:28, 29; 15:15; 16:16-23; 17:18, 24ff; 18:21; 19:27; 26:33-75; Mk. 5:37; 11:21; 13:3; 14:29-72; 16:7; Lk. 8:45-51; 22:8; Jn. 1:40-44; 6:8, 68; 12:22; 13:6-9, 24, 36; 18:10-27; 20:2-6; 21:2-21; Acts 1-15; Gal. 1:18;

2:7-14; I, II Peter. *James and John*; Mt. 10:2; 17:1f; Mk. 1:29; 5:37f; 9:33; 10:35f; 13:3; 14:33; Lk. 5:10; 9:54; 22:8; Ac. 1:13; 3:4; 8:14; 12:2; Gal. 2:9; Rev. 1:1, 9; 22:8; the Gospel of John, I, II, III John and Revelation.

Behold the glorious, surpassing wisdom of Jesus. He chose fishermen to change the world! He ever chooses the foolish to confound the wise. (I Cor. 1:18-31, esp. vv. 26-28) If Jesus can make such everlasting good use of such humble instruments as these four fishermen, dear friend, what can He do with your life when surrendered to Him?

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Name the four fishermen.
2. The father of James and John was \_\_\_\_\_; the father of Peter and Andrew was \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Did Peter and Andrew live in Capernaum? (Cf. Jn. 1:44)
4. What were the fishermen doing when Jesus first saw them?
5. At what time of day approximately did Jesus approach them?
6. What did Jesus ask Simon to do?
7. Why did Simon do it?
8. Had these men known Jesus before? If so, when or how long?
9. What did Jesus ask all the four fishermen to do?
10. What did He promise or predict concerning them?
11. What inducement did Jesus offer them to justify their leaving all to follow him? Did Jesus mention any compensations? What was the motivation that caused this sudden, clean break with one occupation to take up that of following Jesus?
12. The four "forsook all" and followed their Master. (Lk. 5:11) Did the "all" in any case include wife or children?
13. Tell all you know about each of the lives of the four fishermen, their past, their work with Jesus, their families, their service as leaders in the early church, and, if possible, their death.
14. What is the significance or importance of Jesus' calling these and other disciples to be with Him from this point of time on? Or, why must the choice of certain disciples to be with Jesus be made early in His work? (Cf. Ac. 1:21, 22)
15. Describe a typical fishing trip of the four fishermen, telling how they used their boats, nets, their hours for fishing, their methods.