

God Himself Calls Disciples

Mark 1:16-20

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Introduction

Today we shall continue our sermon series from *The Gospel According to Mark*.

- You have probably noticed that so far all of the sermon titles have begun with the words “God Himself.”
 - Mark 1:1-8 was: “God Himself Will Baptise You.”
 - Mark 1:9-11 was: “God Himself Is Baptised.”
 - Mark 1:12-13 was: “God Himself Is Tempted.”
 - Mark 1:14-15 was: “God Himself Preaches the Gospel.”
 - And today, Mark 1:16-20, is: “God Himself Calls Disciples.”

These titles emphasise the thing that Mark emphasises from the very first verse: that Jesus Christ is God the Son who is among us.

- What makes these things so special is that He is Son of God.
 - When He baptises us as God, we receive the Holy Spirit who transforms and cleanses us within. Man can only baptise with water, but He baptises with the Holy Spirit.
 - When He was baptised, it meant that the whole church would be cleansed. He is joined to His church as Mediator and His baptism was His death on the cross that cleanses us all.
 - When He was tempted, Him being God meant that He would not fall the way our first representative (Adam) fell.
 - When He preached the good news that the kingdom of God is here, it certainly was true—He is God and He brought the kingdom when He came.

Today we are going to look at how God the Son called His first four disciples to follow Him and once again we will see how significant it is that He who called was God.

Listen as I read the text to you... It is Mark 1:16-20.

- This is the word of God:

Mark 1:16-20: And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ Then Jesus said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” ¹⁸ They immediately left their nets and followed Him. ¹⁹ When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also *were* in the boat mending their nets. ²⁰ And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.

May the LORD add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word.

This is such a momentous event, yet it is so simple...

- Here you have the Son of God calling four men who will be among the twelve that were appointed to testify to the whole world that He is the Son of God who came into the world to save sinners. This is the beginning of the church (community of persons) that will bear this message to the nations.

- This is huge, and yet, here He is walking by the Sea of Galilee and calling four ordinary fishermen to follow Him. This did not make the papers.
 - There is no great audience, no great venue, no great speeches, no attendants, no important city—just fishermen in a picturesque place doing their daily business.
 - This is the eternal God intersecting with the mundane, beginning to gather a community around Himself.
 - As R. T. France says, “The kingdom of God comes not with fanfare but through the gradual gathering of a group of socially insignificant people in an unnoticed corner of provincial Galilee.”
- Yet, for all of the simplicity and lack of ostentation of any kind...

I. It is clear that the One who calls these disciples is none other than God.

A. You can see that He is God by the call itself.

1. He comes to these fishermen and says “Follow Me.”
 - A more literal rendering makes it even more striking.
 - In the original, there is actually no verb.
 - He simply says, “Here, behind Me.”
 - And He means that they are to come behind Him for good... not just for the afternoon, but in a permanent relationship with Him.
 - He meant it in a literal and local sense in which they were to actually go with Him wherever He went...
 - And He also meant it in a moral or figurative sense in which they are to follow His ways... to imitate Him and to depend on Him and to obey Him.
 - And note well, He is not calling them merely to pursue a common cause with Him—to join Him in some project or some movement...
 - He is calling them to *Himself*—He Himself is the object of their pursuit.
 - They are to be devoted to Him... He is to be their goal.
 2. How audacious it would be for an ordinary man to do this... To come up to you at work and to say, “Hither, behind me.”
 - The great rabbis of the day did not gather disciples in that way.
 - If you wanted to be the disciple of a rabbi, you had to apply to him a bit like students apply to university today.
 - The disciple had to take the initiative and had to prove that he was worthy and qualified... perhaps passing an entrance exam of some sort.
 - The kings of Israel did not behave in this manner either—though proud kings of the nations sometimes have to their shame...
 - In Israel the kings knew that they had no right to make such demands.
 - They knew that such authority did not belong to men—only a prophet or one who was much more than prophet could invade someone’s life like this.
- So the first way we see that He is God is in the way He demanded that these men follow Him.

B. You can also see that He is God by the promise He makes to them: “I will make you become fishers of men.”

1. He uses this wonderful phrase *fishers of men* to speak of the work of the ministry.
 - J.C. Ryle points out that this is the first term that is used for the work of the minister—not a mere reader of forms or one who administers ordinances, but a fisher of souls.
 - It is important for ministers to remember this—They are there to plead with sinners (as Paul says) to be reconciled to God.
 - Traditionalists forget this as they administer ordinances without much regard to their effect...
 - And modern evangelists forget this when they get more concerned about increasing attendance than they are about bringing sinners to the Lord.
 - All are to be fishers of men for the LORD, not for themselves.
 - Many other occupational terms are also used to describe the work of a minister:
 - He is a builder, a farmer, a reaper, a shepherd, a steward, a servant...
 - All are fitting, but here to these fishermen, it is that He will make them who were fishers of fish become fishers of men.
2. But observe: He will make them such.
 - He does not speak of their present qualification for this work.
 - He does not say, “I have searched all around and I have found you men to stand out above all the rest as qualified to be fishers of men.”
 - Instead He confidently asserts that He will *make* them to be what they need to be for Him... He will make them to become fishers of men.
 - He knew and they knew that they were not able to do this now.
 - He was going to change them and enable them by divine power.
 - His transforming grace must work in them to radically change their character if they are to be fishers of men. They must learn, as James Edwards says:
 - to mind the things of God instead of the things of self (Mark 8:33),
 - to understand the truth (Mark 8:14-21),
 - to bear persecution (Mark 13:13),
 - to watch and pray (Mark 14:37),
 - to follow (Mark 14:50),
 - and to serve (Mark 10:45).
 - But even these changes will not make them fishers of men!
 - There is still required upon them the powerful working of the Holy Spirit... upon them, through them, and in the lives of those they preach to.
 - Only the one who is God could promise to make these men or any man a fisher of men.
 - And that is what He promises to do here—because He is the Son of God who has all authority and power.
 - A mere man could not make such a promise to anyone.

TRANS> But there is a third way that we can see from this call that He is God...

- C. You can see that He is God by the way these fishermen respond to His call.
1. There is something entirely supernatural about it.
 - It is a call that has power behind it—it comes with authority that penetrates their souls and that they cannot escape or resist.
 - There is a sense that it is God who is speaking and that “no” or even “let me think about it” are not options.
 - It is the voice of God that has broken into their lives. They immediately follow Him.
 2. What is especially striking is that they leave all to follow Him.
 - a. Simon and Andrew are said to leave their nets to follow Him, and James and John are said to leave their father in the boat with the hired servants.
 - This is their livelihood, their career—even their business.
 - These men were not beggars on the street who had nothing else to do—they were not even hired hands—they were business owners.
 - They owned boats and tackle and nets.
 - The fish from the fresh waters of the Sea of Galilee were highly prized—being shipped to Jerusalem and even as far as Alexandria in Egypt.
 - In the Greco Roman world, fish was a staple that held the place that beef does for us.
 - We are told that John was known to the high priest—likely as one who did business with him—providing fish to his household from Galilee.
 - It is supposed that these men must have learned Greek (as we discover when they write scripture) because it was the language of commerce.
 - b. But you know that it is no easy thing for men to part with a thriving business... especially a family business from which he has his livelihood.
 - And to follow one who has very little—a carpenter’s son who has recently come from Nazareth—a man who had less than these fishermen in the way of worldly possessions—a man who would lodge in Peter’s house while He was in the area—that was a huge thing.
 - Yet, He calls and they leave all to follow Him—without hesitation.
 3. What else could they do when the Son of God called them?
 - They had heard His voice and they could not resist.
 - Not that they were fully conscious of who He was at this time—but more that the authority of His words was not of men... but from God.
 - As Jesus put it in John’s gospel, “My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me.”
 - Understand that they were not strangers to Him—they had seen enough of Him to know that He was at least a prophet—and because His Spirit was working in them to make them responsive, they could not resist the Word of God.
 - The barrier to follow has more to do with stubbornness than it does with discerning whether the call is from God or not.

TRANS> So now I hope you can see that it was God the Son who called these men.

II. This calling of the Son of God to Simon (or Peter as he is better known to us), Andrew, James, and John relates to you in two important ways.

A. First, the calling of these men is a gift to you... indeed to the whole world.

1. It was part of the great plan of our LORD to call these men to follow Him—literally to follow Him—while He was on earth.

- As you know, they are four of twelve that were called, but these four that Mark speaks of here are the four principle disciples of Jesus—especially Peter, James, and John.

- He called them not merely to be His assistants, but to be His witnesses.

a. It was their task to be with Him that they might see His work...

- To see the miracles that show that He is from heaven and that show us things about His kingdom—such as that He is the resurrection and the life.
- To hear His teaching that instructs us of God, of life under God, of grace, of promises, and of the service and conduct to which we are all called.
- But perhaps most importantly of all, that they might see His saving work on the cross followed by His resurrection from the dead and declare it to us and explain to us what it means...
 - It was their task to be witnesses of it and to tell us that He died for the remission of our sins, and rose to reign until He has fully established His righteous kingdom in the earth... to bring us to God.

b. As witnesses, they have provided for the church a written record of all that we need to know in order to be restored to a right relationship with the true God.

- John, one of the ones that Jesus called here, expresses this in his first letter to the church:
 - **1 John 1:1-3: That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— [He is talking, of course, about Jesus] ² the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— ³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.**

c. The Lord has seen fit to preserve the testimony of the apostles in the scriptures.

- The scriptures have been put into the hands of the church for every generation to use.
 - It is here, in scripture, that the apostles tell us of His miracles and what they mean.
 - It is here, in scripture, that the apostles tell us of His teachings.
 - And it is here, in scripture, that they testify of His suffering and death and of His resurrection and ascension so that we might believe and be saved.

2. You will do well to take heed to the things that they have written in the word.
 - Hebrews 2:3-4 asks a good question: **how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, ⁴ God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?**
 - God in His Word calls us to come to Christ that we might be delivered from His wrath and judgment and restored to His favour.
 - In the scriptures you have not the word of men, but the word of God.
 - Our LORD enabled these men to know and understand the truth and to record it perfectly that they might convey the things we need to know for salvation.
 - The apostles knew, even as they wrote, that they were writing the word of God... as Paul says in 1 Cor 14:37, "The things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord."
 - By putting it in writing, we have a permanent record that can be translated in every language and used to test what is preached to us.
 - 2 Tim 3:16 says: **All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.**
 - All goes back to the scriptures given to us by the apostles.
- What an important book this is!
3. This is so important that Christ has been pleased not only to call apostles, but also prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers to minister the word to us.
 - In Ephesians 4:11-13, it says of Jesus: **And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.**
 - He used the apostles and prophets to deliver the scriptures, and then He used (and uses) the evangelists, pastors, and teachers to continue to bring it to all the world from generation to generation.
 - Give thanks for those He has sent to bring His word to you... especially the apostles and prophets who gave us the scriptures...
 - Pray for those who are preaching the word today.
 - Show your gratitude to the Lord by coming eagerly to hear the word preached.
 - Come with eagerness, come with faith, come with a readiness to receive it as the word of God.
 - To believe what it says, to rest in its promises, to learn of its subject which is Christ, to follow its examples, and to obey its commandments.
 - Where would we be if Jesus had not called the apostles and the other ministers of the word?
 - Some naively abandon the church, but the church with its ministers and elders and deacons is the society that Jesus established for His work to continue.

- How glad we should be that Jesus has done this!

TRANS> Yes indeed, the calling of these men is a gift to the church... but...

B. The calling of these men also furnishes us with an example to be followed.

1. You are also called to follow Him as they were.

- There are differences in that we are not called to follow Him in the literal way that Peter, Andrew, James, and John were...as one walking around on earth...
 - But we are to follow Him in the way of adhering to Him, of relying upon Him, and of obeying His call to repent and believe.
- Jesus makes the call to follow universal for us all in Mark 8:34-38.
 - There He says: **When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ³⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? ³⁷ Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”**

➤ Every one of you is called to deny yourself and follow Him... or perish.

2. This is the opposite of the false gospels you hear so much today.

- This call is about Him—it is about Him at the centre instead of you.
 - We are called to follow *Him* and to do *His* will as our LORD.
 - He is not primarily in the business of meeting needs, but of being God who is worshipped and glorified.
 - He delivers us from the hollow pursuit of self by His call so that we can be consumed with His glory.
- Sadly, the modern church in our land is full of non-biblical words like self-fulfillment, self-love, self-esteem, and self-confidence...
 - But the language of our Lord in scripture has very different words like self-denial, self-sacrifice, self-surrender, self-control.
 - We need to embrace these words if we want to be Jesus’ disciples.
 - I meet so many unhappy Christians...who are disappointed because they are not getting what they want... why am I sick, overweight, tired, unproductive, unsuccessful, fearful?
 - The goal of salvation is to put us under the glorious God to promote Him and His glory—whether in sickness or in health, success or failure...
 - We need to learn to lose our lives for Him... that is where we belong... following Him and promoting His glory.
- Perhaps your life is wreck because you are all worried about what you are getting in life instead of living for the glory of God.
 - His principle message is not: “I will come and meet your needs,”
 - His principle message is: “Come and follow Me,”... or more exactly, “Here—behind Me!” and you will learn to live for God instead of self.

- Part of that very instruction often involves suffering for Him.
3. Essentially, following Him is what you promise to do when you join the church and take your vows.
- In the New Testament, they testified that Jesus was LORD when they believed.
 - You enter into covenant with Jesus as your LORD.
 - You look to Him to save you so that you can serve God as God.
 - This commitment demands everything of you... your life... your all.
 - From henceforth, your life is for Him.
 - You no longer live for yourself, but for Him who loved you and gave Himself for you that you might be reconciled to God.
 - That means that you must give up all that is contrary to His will—ungodly relationships, habits, attitudes—things like immorality, anger, bitterness, self-pity... you are here for God.
 - And it means that whatever He has commanded, you follow—loving Him with all our heart, worshipping Him on the Lord’s Day, tithing and giving to the poor, honouring and obeying your parents, pouring out your life for your wife and children, serving others, giving thanks to God in all things.
- Perhaps this seems impossible?
- Well indeed it is impossible—but with God all things are possible—and Jesus who calls you is God!
 - As we have seen...
4. The call is also about the magic of His transforming power and grace.
- Remember that when He called Peter, Andrew, James, and John, He told them that He would make them to become fishers of men.
 - He did not just tell them to be fishers of men.
 - He is the one who makes you what He calls you to be when you come to Him.
 - He promises to make you to be all that He has called you to be.
 - It is not by might nor by power, but by His Spirit.
 - You are not His servant by nature, but He makes you His servant by His power and grace when you come to Him.
 - He is God and He will do it.

Conclusion: The great question for you is whether you *have* come to Him to follow Him.

- He is God and He is to be followed.
 - He has the authority to completely invade your life and to take it over, and if you know Him as LORD, He has.
 - You are no longer your own... you belong to Him.
 - Like the apostles, you have come to follow Him and He is shaping you to be what He has called you to be... *His* disciple who does *His* work.
- Is that true in your case?
 - Are you His disciple?
 - Are you one of His sheep—who hears His voice and comes to Him... or are you one of the ones Jesus spoke to when He said:

- John 10:26-27: **“But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. ²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”**