

The Demands of Discipleship

Mark 1:14-20

Introduction – Believers Only or Disciples?

Please turn in your Bible to the Gospel of Mark. We are going to begin by reading a few verses of scripture as we continue our series in this “Gospel of Action”. Look at chapter 1, verses 14 through 22.

Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God,

and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel.”

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 fishermen.

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.

They went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach.

They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Theodore Roosevelt once wrote, “There has never yet been a man who lived a life of ease whose name is worth remembering.”

We are about to be introduced to four men who are worth remembering because they gave up, as it were, their lives of ease and followed the Savior. They represent something that I want to distinguish for you today.

We have, I think, in our evangelical world or the world of Christians, two types of individuals. There are those who are believers and then, there are those who are disciples. There are:

- those who believe only, and for them, Christianity is a convenience;
- those who are disciples, and for them, Christianity is a crusade.

I want to introduce four men today.

Who Did Christ Choose?

Let us begin by taking a look at who Christ chose to be His disciples.

Notice again Mark 1:14-15. Between verse 14 and the previous verse, there is a period of one year. During that year, the Lord Jesus has been preaching the gospel of the kingdom,

...repent and believe...

More than likely, since Jesus’ base of operation would be in Galilee, these four men had heard Jesus preach many times. In fact, it is a likelihood that

Jesus knew these men already, by name. They were probably followers of John the Baptist and had already been baptized. It was about the time for Jesus to begin to call to Himself the band of men who would not only believe, but would become disciples.

In Mark 1:16-19, notice the four men that Jesus would choose to be His disciples.

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 fishermen. . . . 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.

The word “by” is the word “para,” which means that Jesus probably took His sandals off and was literally, walking along the seashore; down by the water.

In my study of this passage, I discovered that there were two kinds of fishing nets. There was a net that they would skillfully throw out of a boat and, as they threw it, it would form something like an umbrella. It would land in the water and then, they would scoop up all the fish they could catch.

There was also another kind of net, which they were throwing in this instance. It was a net that was very large and was weighted along the bottom. They would unroll it off the side of the boat and it would sink until it was totally extended. The boat would then begin to move and this net would catch all the fish in its path.

You may remember the story in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 5, in which evidently, this second kind of net had been dropped. They caught so many fish that it was beginning to pull the boat under. When they tried to raise up the net, they had to call to some other men to come to their boat and help with the haul.

These men were diligent about their business and they were fishing on the Sea of Galilee.

Notice who these four men are:

- Simon, whose name will be changed to Peter, or “petra,” which means “rock,” is mentioned in verse 16.

Simon is the impetuous one. If I were choosing disciples, I am not sure I would have chosen this man. I have often wondered where in the world he got a sword. You may remember that in the Garden of Gethsemane, the crowd was coming after Christ and

Simon Peter has a sword (John 18:10). I think this man was constantly armed and ready for a fight.

- Andrew, also named in verse 16, had absolutely no leadership ability at all.

When Andrew is mentioned, in fact, he is usually referred to as, “Andrew, Simon Peter’s little brother.” On the four occasions that his name is mentioned in the gospels, he is hiding behind someone else. He sort of pushes someone else forward to introduce them to Jesus Christ, and he stays in the background.

- James and John are mentioned in verse 19.

These are two men who are totally filled with self-ambition. In fact, after following the Lord for three entire years, their perceptive question, after all of His teaching, is, “Lord, who’s going to be number one in the kingdom? Who’s going to have the chief seat?” They are two men who are totally ambitious for personal gain.

These are the four men that Jesus chose as His disciples.

Why Did Christ Choose Them?

Let me give four reasons why I think Jesus chose these four men.

1. First, they were diligent men.

As Jesus Christ was walking along the shores of Galilee, picking His way among the pebbles as the water would lap across His feet, He saw men who were already working; who were already diligent. I believe that there is a relationship between the kind of individual who makes a good disciple and the kind of individual who makes a good employee or a good housewife – a good worker.

I remember hearing one man say, “Even God cannot steer a parked car.”

I never forgot that saying. Jesus is looking for individuals who are already diligent in their business, so that all He needs to do is redirect their energy toward the cause of the kingdom.

2. Secondly, they were also available.

This is so easily overlooked. Look again at verse 18, which begins with the word “immediately”. Mark uses that word over forty times in this gospel.

Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

The word “left” is in the aorist tense, which means that they “once for all” left their nets. It was a

decision that they made, then and there, at that point in their lives, and they never went back to fishing.

These men left immediately. They were available.

3. Thirdly, they were flexible.

I like the thought that the Lord chose men whose minds were uncluttered by the traditions of the religious world.

They had a saying, during this time, that if you wanted to be religious; if you wanted to be spiritual, you lived in Jerusalem where the temple was. You would go to the temple and worship and make sacrifices. So, if you wanted to be spiritual, you lived in Jerusalem.

However, if you wanted to be rich, you lived in Galilee. Because this was, in part, true, these men were considered something of outcasts of the religious system. As a result of being away from the synagogues or the temples, they did not hear the *Talmud* and the *Mishnah* and all the additions to the Law taught, that we have previously discussed.

You may remember that one law said that a person could not walk more than a thousand yards on the sabbath day. But, if you took a rope and strung it from your doorway to a door a thousand yards away, then you could begin from that point and walk another thousand yards and be safe.

These four men did not care about that kind of thing. I think they had clear eyes and could see right through the façade of religiosity. They were uncluttered men who were very flexible and available to be taught something totally revolutionary.

These men were mavericks. When Jesus chose His disciples, He did not go to the local institutions of learning; He did not ask, "Who's the rabbi with the most learning available?" He went to men who were fishermen and, as we think of them, who were totally out of the picture with the religious world.

I think of William Carey, a man who would open up the world of India through foreign missions. As a young man, he approached a group of clergymen, sitting in all their starch. William Carey stood before these men and presented his burden for India. No one had ever gone to India and they only knew that there were plenty of heathen there. In the middle of his proclamation of his burden, one of the men stood and said, "Young William, sit down and let us have enough of this talk of people in India. If God wants them saved, He will save them alone."

Fortunately, William Carey disagreed and began to swim against the current of popular opinion by going to India. Perhaps you have heard of his name. He is worth remembering. He gave up a life of ease.

4. Finally, they were teachable.

This characteristic introduces the next point we will discuss.

What Was the Curriculum?

What was the curriculum that Jesus had for these four men? There is one key word in the training process of Jesus Christ with these disciples. If we could sum it up, and I say this cautiously, but if we could total everything up in this teaching process of making men disciples, what was the key to His curriculum? Make a note of one word, and that word is, "association".

There are two key phrases for disciples only. If you are to be a disciple; if you are to follow, to associate with, to stick to Christ; if you are going to have this kind of lifestyle that demands more than a simple belief, that demands inconvenience and a crusade type of existence, two phrases would be for you. He gives them in the gospels.

1. The first phrase Jesus says, in Mark 1:17, is,
... Follow Me . . .

This could literally be translated, "Stick to Me." It is used throughout the scriptures, and even by secular Greek writers, of an individual who would walk the same road as their teacher.

Jesus Christ is saying, "Get on the road that I am walking and stick to Me; associate with Me."

In this curriculum, there were no textbooks, there were no handouts, and there were no exams. This curriculum was association with the person of Jesus Christ.

These men would live with Jesus. They would watch Him eat; they would watch Him respond; they would listen to Him teach. They would see His life.

If you and I are to be disciples, we must be associated intimately with the person of Jesus Christ.

Notice what Jesus would teach them, which will also give us our second phrase. Look at verse 17 again,

And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."

The word “become,” is the word “ginomai,” which refers not to an overnight process. This was not a process in which you would say, “If you want to be a disciple, take two of these, drink lots of juice, and by next weekend, you will be a disciple.”

No. This was a long, tedious, conforming process. It took a lot of time. In fact, after three years, you would think that some of these guys would have even “gotten off the dime”. However, Jesus would make them to become, “ginomai,” in the process of totally turning about their characters and their personalities.

2. Look at what they would become, and this is our second phrase,
...fishers of men.

I can just see Peter pulling the Lord aside, “Now, Lord, it’s obvious that You’ve spent too much time in the carpenter shop. And, by the way, have You ever even baited a hook? You should know that you do not fish for men, you fish for fish.”

I can just see Peter instructing the Lord in the way more properly. Yet, you never hear a response from the men, even though Jesus Christ is using terminology that they know everything about.

They knew everything about fishing, but they knew nothing about the hearts of men. Jesus Christ said,

... Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.

The word “fisher” is translated “catcher,” so this is saying, “catchers of men.” The word is used only one other time outside of the gospels – it is used in reference to Satan, who catches men. Jesus Christ is basically saying, “Satan, and his world system, is seeking to catch men for his kingdom, and I want to train you to catch men for My kingdom.” It is as if there is a battle going on for the souls of men.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you are to be a disciple, then you are going to be a catcher of men and women for the kingdom of God. As you look back over your life, over the last six months, or year, or two years, have you ever shared Jesus Christ with another individual? If you say, “Well, no, I haven’t,” then you are not a disciple, you are a believer only.

Jesus says,

... I will make you become fishers of men.

What Was the Cost?

Now, what was the cost of discipleship?

Jesus Christ would say, in Mark 8:34,

... If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must...

Jesus then says two things we must do to be His disciple,

... deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

1. First, Jesus says,

... he must deny himself...

This literally means, “Let him learn to say, ‘No,’ to himself.”

This is like the mother with a child who wants something to eat that the mother knows would be unprofitable for the child. Perhaps the child wants to do something that the mother and father knows would not help them grow up to be healthy and wise. So, Mom and Dad learn to say, “No,” to save that child from ruin.

Jesus Christ says, “If you want to be My disciple, you need to learn to say, ‘No,’ to the things that are unhealthy; to the things that are unwise; to the things that would hinder your knowledge of My character. I want you to learn to say, ‘No,’ to that.”

You must deny yourself. Learn to say, “No.”

2. Secondly, Jesus says,

... he must... take up his cross...

You must take up your cross, or literally, put to death any personal ambition. This meant to throw away your life.

Today, we are hearing that Jesus Christ stood on the shores of Galilee and said, “Follow Me, and I will make you popular.” Or, “Follow Me, and I will make you wealthy.” Or, “Follow Me, and I will make you healthy.” Or, “Follow Me, and I will make you happy.” Isn’t that the popular “prosperity theology” that we are hearing today?

Ladies and gentlemen, Jesus Christ says, “Follow Me, and I will make you unwelcome wherever you go. Follow Me, and I will cause or make you to suffer persecution. Follow Me, and I will make you endure hardship. Follow Me, and I will make you the laughing stock of Judaism. Follow Me, and I will cause you to live in the minority. Follow Me, and I will make you face the lions and the burning stake.”

When Jesus called men to Himself, He had absolutely no motivational gimmicks at all. There

was no motivation to follow Him, other than this: that you might learn of Him, that you might know Him, that you might serve Him.

The apostle Paul said,

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings . . . (Philippians 3:10)

Why Were There Casualties?

Why were there casualties? Turn to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 14, where we will look for the answer to this question.

Here is this Man, Jesus – visible, performing miracles, doing all of these things which attest to the fact that He is indeed the Son of God – so why were there so few disciples? Why were there not hundreds of them? I am going to give the reasons from Luke 14:16-20.

Look at verses 16 and 17.

But He said to him, “A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many, and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’”

Now, in these days, because everyone was not wearing a Seiko or a Timex watch, you were invited to a banquet and then, because it took hours to prepare, you would receive another invitation when all of the food was hot and ready. So, the master would send the servant out to all of those who had accepted the invitation. Evidently, all of these people had initially accepted. Then, the servant came knocking, “The supper is ready.”

Notice what they said, in verses 18 through 20. Understand that behind any excuse is a lack of desire.

But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, “I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.” Another one said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.” Another one said, “I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.”

Let us take a hard look at these excuses because to the master, it was obvious that there was a lack of desire. These men were either liars or they were foolish businessmen. Imagine buying a piece of land without seeing it. Imagine buying some oxen without

ever testing them to find out whether they could even pull the plow.

“Well, I bought a piece of land. Now, I think I ought to go and see it.”

What a lame excuse.

“I bought some oxen. Now, I need to go see if they’re alive.”

That is even worse.

The worst one is the third one! He had married a wife. Why in the world would he not bring his wife with him? Why would he not invite her to come along?

We have three reasons in these verses that are so lame that it is amazing they ever gave them. Do we do that today? No, of course not!

I had, in my files, a list of excuses that people gave an insurance company as to why they got into an accident. Have you ever heard of this? People write in because they have been in an accident and it is their fault, but they give an excuse to try to get out of paying the premium. Some of you may work for insurance companies and have seen some of these. Let me read three of them.

One lady writes, “I turned a corner and a telephone pole hit my car.”

I picture in my mind, lurking behind the corner, this mischievous telephone pole that is ready to pounce on some car!

Another lady writes an even more classic excuse, “The man didn’t know which way to run, so I ran over him.”

Can you imagine?

A man writes this excuse that is the classic of them all, “I pulled away from the curb, glanced at my mother-in-law, and headed over the embankment.”

Lame excuses! We come up with them!

So, we have three excuses that these men gave in this Luke passage. They are reasons that exist today; that is, real estate or a possession, oxen or a business, a wife or a natural affection. What is holding me back from being a disciple; from turning Christianity into a crusade? Is it my business? Do you not understand that that business is your mission field? That is where you are to crusade.

They gave their excuses. Then, in the last part of this chapter, three times, we read the result:

- Verse 26, “... *he cannot be My disciple.*”
- Verse 27, “... *[he] cannot be My disciple.*”
- Verse 33, “... *none of you can be My disciple.*”

They were disqualified; unable. Their belief was a convenience – they were believers only, not disciples.

Application – Is There a Personal Challenge?

When I read this passage, ladies and gentlemen, it fills me with fear. Am I a disciple of Jesus Christ or am I a believer only? Is there a personal challenge to this? Absolutely.

Am I a believer or am I a disciple? I want to give three questions that will give the symptoms to determining in your own life, not someone else's life, but *your* life, whether you are a disciple or only a believer.

1. First, do I have a hunger for God's Word?

I want to be practical today. Do you come to church on Sunday and kind of blow the dust off the pages of your Bible and say, “Yep, it's that time of the week again. I guess I'll get my Bible out and unstick the pages.” Or, do you have a real hunger for God's Word? Are you in the Bible?

2. Secondly, do I have a commitment to the body of Christ; a commitment to other workers?

When Jesus was on earth, He was presenting the kingdom program. If you were a disciple, you got on board and followed that kingdom program. Today, in the age of grace, Jesus Christ has instituted the body. That is the plan. Are you part of it? Or, are you sitting by and watching?

3. Thirdly, directly from the text, do I have a burden for a lost world?

Jesus said,

... Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.

D. L. Moody was visiting a church in a large city. He was looking out the window of the pastor's second story office, watching the teaming people on the street below. The pastor came over and, with his chest kind of stuck out, asked Moody, “What do you see?”

The pastor was impressed with the city and the location of the church. D. L. Moody said, “I see

hundreds and hundreds of people who do not know Christ.”

If I am a believer only, I can get by with just a perusal of the Bible – perhaps on Sunday and maybe a Proverb some time during the week. If I am a believer only, I will put in an appearance in the local assembly, but I will never have a commitment to the body of Christ. If I am a believer only, and not a disciple, I will say, “Yes, my next door neighbor is unsaved.” Or, “I am not sure if the people that I work with at the office know Christ, but I will never open my mouth to present Him and say, ‘Let me tell you about Jesus Christ and what He did for me.’”

On the morning after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, more than two thousand soldiers galloped out of Washington in pursuit of John Wilkes Booth, the assassin. On April 26th, a detachment of twenty-five soldiers, led by two detectives, finally tracked Booth down in a tobacco barn in Virginia, just sixty miles outside of the capital.

Now, the Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, had ordered that Booth and a cohort be brought back alive. However, they were stationed in the barn and had revolvers; they were ready to fight. The soldiers could not get in, so finally, Lieutenant Daugherty, who was in charge of the soldiers, decided to burn the men out. He made a rope of straw, lit it, and threw it into the barn. Soon, the flames licked at the straw and there was a blazing fire in the barn.

Daugherty had men stationed all around the barn. One soldier, at the rear of the barn, could see Booth through the slats in the barn wall. Booth had his rifle as if he were ready to fire, so this soldier, compulsively and against orders, raised his revolver and fired. The bullet hit Booth in the back of the head, in almost exactly the same place where Lincoln had been shot. Booth sagged forward on the burning floor and the soldiers rushed in and pulled him out.

The soldiers pulled Booth up to the porch of the nearby house. They thought Booth was dead, but when they splashed water in his face, he revived and began to move about a bit. He was delirious with pain and his voice was just a whisper. One of the soldiers was leaning down near his mouth and heard Booth whisper, “Tell my mother, I thought I did what was best.”

Booth then asked that his paralyzed arms be raised so that he could look at his hands. He uttered

his last words, as he looked at his hands, “Useless. Useless.”

Two hours later, as the morning sun rose, Booth died.

Ladies and gentlemen, one day there is going to be an account given. I wonder how many of us will say,

in light of eternity, of our lives, “I did what I thought was best for myself,” but, when we total it up, it was absolutely useless.

Is Christianity a crusade? Are you a believer only or *are you a disciple?*

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