



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613

(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

Jesus Is... Calling!

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Rev. Steve Kramer

TEXT: Mark 1:14-20 (NRSV)

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed Him. As He went a little farther, He saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed Him.

Dear friends,

Forty-three percent of the Bible is narratives, meaning stories; miracle stories and birth stories, many, many other kinds of stories. Last week, we examined the battle story: Jesus versus Satan out in the wilderness. And today, we're going to look at a "call" story. In this narrative before us, we see Jesus beginning His ministry in Galilee. We're told He is proclaiming, calling out to the people of Galilee about something very important. His message is referred to in Mark as "the Good News of God." It's the good news that, first of all, that time is fulfilled. This is a special time in history. In fact, all of history has pointed to this moment. The waiting is over. God is on the move. He's up to something big. It's good news also that the kingdom of God has come near, Jesus says. Now, the kingdom of God is not about a geographical location, but it's about the reign

of God, the rule of God. He's saying a new life under God has arrived on the scene. There's a future component to this kingdom, by the way. God's kingdom will come in its fullness on the last day of history, and there will be a new Heaven and a new Earth. But it has also begun now with Jesus, the son of God, the king. He's pointing to Himself, folks, as He announces His kingdom. Individuals can live under God's rule in the present time, while we wait for the end time. A new and better life with God is available here and now through Jesus. That's what is being said here.

Jesus then goes on to say that, to experience this new kingdom life with Him requires two things on our part. He says: repent and believe the good news. Now, repentance is about turning away from what you're doing, changing direction. There's also the image of leaving behind something, leaving behind the old way of thinking. It's, in essence, trading in your old way of doing life for God's new way of life. Believing is more than just intellectual assent or understanding an agreement. Believing involves taking action on this news you hear; trustingly stepping towards this kingdom that Jesus is describing and entering into it, inviting God to rule over one's life. I imagine you're looking at a chair. Do you believe it exists? Sure you do. Do you think it can support you if you sat down on it? Well, you won't know for sure until you sit down, right? Well, that's what Jesus means when He talks about believing. It's something that you act upon and trust in.

So the gist of this good news of God that Jesus is announcing is that God is up to something big – He wants to rule in the hearts of people and fix His broken world. His kingdom is presently available and can be entered into by turning away from the old way of thinking and doing life and entering into a new way of life under God's rule. A better life has become available for you and me. Now we need to ask: what does this sort of response of repentance and believing look like? Give us a little flesh so we can understand better. And Mark's gospel does that – he goes on to give us a living illustration of this with a call story, the calling of the first disciples. What does Jesus say to these fisherman, Peter, Andrew, James and John? He says, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” “Follow”... it means to come after. “Come after me,” Jesus says, “get behind me and let's go.” Notice He doesn't say, “Come study the Torah with me,” though they'll get a lot of teaching from the Old Testament. Jesus will teach them a lot. But no, He says, “Follow me,” as if to say He is the main subject matter. So this is a personal call to follow Jesus.

Following also implies that He's going to be doing the leading. He calls the shots and leads them in this new kingdom way, kind of like the children's game "Follow the Leader," you might say. This story has, by the way, a unique twist to it. Back in those days, pupils would approach the rabbis and ask them to take them on as their students. But here we have Jesus taking the initiative of calling His students. In John's gospel we will find Jesus saying to them, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." And by the way, speaking of choosing, I find it very encouraging who these people are that Jesus calls to follow: middle-class, ordinary fishermen, businessmen; not a theological or biblical degree in the whole bunch. No powerful types to make this kind of movement take off. No, we see that ordinary people are called and we see that Jesus really does have big plans for the future with them. He says, "I will make you fish for people."

And so we learn in these words from Jesus that the good news isn't just about Jesus and me. He has plans for us. We follow Jesus for the sake of bringing others into His kingdom. He wants everyone to get in on this. This discipleship program of His is about an apprenticeship under Him. That's what these fishermen and the others that follow are going to become: apprentices. He plans to turn them into effective disciples and witnesses that will be effective and impact the lives of those who don't know Jesus yet, and bring them into God's kingdom.

And here's the kicker: they answered the call. They dropped everything: their nets, their business, and followed Jesus. They gave themselves totally over to His leadership. And that's amazing when you stop to think about it; they didn't get a road map from Jesus or an itinerary or a syllabus about what they're going to be doing. And yet they went – they struck out on this adventure with Jesus entering into uncharted territory. We actually have a picture here, then, of repentance and believing. They left behind the old and followed Jesus into the new, trusting in Him. There was something compelling about Jesus. People have their theories as to why these fishermen went. Some speculate perhaps they were looking for something more in their lives than what they were doing. Or perhaps they had previous encounters with Jesus prior to this day, like we see in the Gospel of John. These people had time to observe and listen and think about Jesus and what He said and about His good news. Mark, though, doesn't bother to tell us anything more than that they left behind everything and followed Jesus. They put themselves under His leadership, His rule. And off they go, knowing little of what lies ahead for them. Don't you wonder what their families thought of all of this, of their decision? As we will see in Mark's gospel, he'll go on to describe life with Jesus. And

these first disciples will have a very interesting and exciting and scary and confusing and anxious and even painful experience at times. Their lives, though, would never be the same after that day.

Now, maybe you're thinking, "Well, that's a nice story, pastor, the calling of the first disciples. But what does it have to do with me?" Well, I'm glad you asked, because Jesus is the risen, living Christ. He died and He rose again and He is still calling people like you and me to follow Him. He invites every one of us to get in on this new kingdom life with Him. And it's a life, He says, that's filled with promises like forgiveness for your sins and a restored daily walk with Him; no moment of your life will ever be faced alone. And it's an everlasting life – not even death can get between you and Jesus. Now, don't get me wrong: it's still a challenging call that Jesus is making. He's basically saying,

Drop what you're doing and follow me. I want priority over your vocation, your family, your career, everything you hold dear. Knowing me and loving me and resembling me and serving me and pursuing me must become the supreme passion of your life. Everything else is to come in second to me. In fact, I want to be at the very center of your existence. I want to be like the sun is to the solar system in your life.

Jesus is talking submission here. Pastor John Ortberg, who is also an author of some fine books, compares this submission to Jesus to driving a car. We need to hand over the keys and let Him drive instead of just having him ride along with us. Listen to this personal story of John Ortberg and his thoughts that followed.

When it was time to take our first child home from the hospital, we put her in the car seat in the back of the car, and then I got in the front seat to drive. She was so small, even the baby seat was way too big. She looked so fragile to me that I drove home on the freeway, going 35 miles per hour with the hazard lights flashing the whole time. That first day when your kid is in the car with you is a scary day.

Does anybody want to know what the next really scary day is with your kid in the car? It's when they turn 16 and now you're handing over the car keys. Now they're moving from the passenger seat, from the ride along seat, into the driver's seat. And that is a very scary moment.

It is a big moment in your life when you hand someone else the keys. Up until now, I've been driving. I choose the destination. I choose the route. I choose the

speed. You're in the drive along seat. But if we are to change seats, if you're going to drive, I have to trust you. It's all about control, isn't it? Well, whoever is in this seat is the person in control.

Now, a lot of people find Jesus handy to have in the car as long as He's in the ride along seat, because something may come up where they require His services. Like "Jesus, I have a health problem. I need some help." Or, "I want you in the car, but I'm not sure I want you driving." If Jesus is driving, you see, I'm not in charge of my life anymore.

For instance, if He's driving, I'm not in charge of my wallet anymore. If I put Him in control, then it's no longer a matter of giving some money now and then when I'm feeling generous or when more of it is coming into my life. Now it's His wallet – scary!

If Jesus is driving, I'm not in charge of my ego anymore. I no longer have the right to satisfy every self-centered ambition. Now it's His agenda. It's His life. Now, I'm not in charge of my mouth anymore. I don't get to gossip or flatter or cajole or deceive, rage, intimidate and manipulate and exaggerate. I get out of the driver's seat and hand the keys over to Him. He's in control.

I'm fully engaged, though. In fact, I'm more alive. I'm more alive than I've ever been before. But it's not my life anymore now it's His life.

May I ask you: who is really in the driver's seat of your life? If it's not Jesus, then who or what is? Is it yourself a relationship, a career, gaining possessions, personal goals? Or are you really more of a fan perhaps than than a follower? And if so, what is the obstacle that's keeping you from changing your mind and becoming a totally committed, devoted follower of Jesus Christ? Is it the issue of trust, as it is for some – fearful that if you get too serious with this Jesus thing, it it'll put a crimp in your lifestyle? Or you're thinking that following Him too closely might be a turnoff for others? After all, you don't want to become an obnoxious, judgmental fanatic who's hard to be around.

Well, let me reassure you first, this is not what Jesus has in mind for your life – to make you a religious, obnoxious fanatic and judgmental. He doesn't care for that kind of behavior or attitude Himself. We see that in the scripture. So how can a person really trust or entrust himself or herself to Him, to His leadership? Well, let me help you. Let me first point you to Jesus on the cross, and I invite you to consider what he's done for you to make you His own. He died in your place for your sinfulness so that you could

be rescued and restored and be in His kingdom. Why did He do this? Because He loves you. I don't deserve that, but He did that for me anyway. So don't be afraid of Him, follow Him, because He has your best interests in mind.

I really appreciate the statement Pastor Tim Keller makes on this subject in his book, *Jesus the King*. He writes,

The gospel isn't advice. It's the good news that you don't need to earn your way to God. Jesus has already done that for you. And it's a gift you receive by sheer grace, God's unmerited favor. If you seize that gift and keep holding on to it, then Jesus' call won't draw you into fanaticism or moderation. You will be passionate to make Jesus your absolute goal and priority – to orbit around Him. This call of Jesus is an exhilarating call to a significant purpose for life, too. He says, "I'll make you fish for people." He's offering you the privilege of calling others into His kingdom. He gives every follower a commission to bring others to Himself by telling them what God has done for them and sharing the difference He's made in your life as you followed Him. And let me tell you, there's not a more rewarding experience in life than bringing someone to Christ Jesus for salvation.

This call from Jesus is also a personal call. No one can respond for you. He wants you to choose to follow Him right now. He's calling you today through this message. Maybe you've been rejecting Him, ignoring Him or just admiring Him from a distance like a fan. Maybe you've known about Him but don't know Him personally and the wonderful life He has for those who follow Him.

Why not today choose Him? Maybe you're wondering, would I be trading up if I decide to do this, to follow Jesus? And the answer to that question is: absolutely yes. I can personally attest to this in my own life. I strayed away from Jesus and tried to do life without Him early on. And then I came to my senses and came back. And I'm so glad to have Him to follow. He knows so much more about life than I do, and where the joy is to be found. He also described Himself as a giant treasure and a great pearl, a possession – that a relationship with him is the most valuable possession that a person can have. It's worth more than anything else in the world.

So I almost forgot, we need to stop here and complete our Jesus is _____ today. Last week we concluded Jesus is: Strong. Today, it's this: today Jesus is calling – calling you

and me to follow Him. So I hope and pray that you will bow your head today and close your eyes and say to Him, "Jesus, I will follow you."

Amen.