

## **Follow Me**

Two Simple Words: Follow Me

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## **Two Simple Words: Follow Me Matthew 4:18-22**

If you have your Bibles and I hope you do, I want to invite you to open with me to Matthew 4.

Two things at the forefront of our minds and our hearts as we were praying through becoming the pastor at The Church at Brook Hills. Two passions at the center of our hearts and our prayers and our minds: Number one, wanting to see the Word of God platformed in the local church. What happens when the Word is supreme and the Word is central and everything is built on the Word and everything revolves around the Word and we see the glory of God in the Word in the local church? We want to see the Word platformed.

Then second, wanting to see the mission of the church, front and center. What happens when the resources, the people of a local church are driven to accomplish the mission for which we were created? To think over the last six months and year just what God has been doing, even as I have been traveling over the last week to see the hunger people have for the Word at these conferences and the hunger that they have for the Word in the local church. Also, the fact that there are literally thousands of people who this week will worship with us through the Word all over the world because the Word is good.

Then, the mission of the local church, making disciples of all nations at the center as opposed to be relegated to something on the side or just completely forgotten all together.

I was teaching at a conference in New Orleans back in November and this was a conference for ministry leaders and as I was talking about impacting the world for the glory of Christ by making disciples, it hit me about half way through. It was something I knew, but it kind of hit me in a fresh way – you know the majority of the people sitting in front of me, I realized had no clue what disciple-making is.

If you were to ask the question, how do you make disciples, across this room, across the rooms that are filled with people on this Sunday morning, I think you would hear all kinds of different answers. You would see a bunch of blank stares. This is the command that is at the center of the Kingdom of God. Make disciples of all nations and if that is the case, we need to know how to do this. We need to know what that means.

So, what we are going to do over the next six weeks is dive into, launch into a study in Scripture to see what it means to be a disciple of Christ and what it means to make disciples. We are going to see what that looks like practically so that it can be said of The Church at Brook Hills, disciple-making is at the center of everything we are doing and we know how to do it. You ask the question across this room and you will hear a biblical response – here is how to do that. I want us to dive in to see that we have got a lot of ground to cover today.

## What Is A Disciple?

We are going to see a picture of what it means to be a disciple of Christ and a few things that are the foundation – What is a disciple? This is going to launch us into the next six weeks and what it means to make disciples. We have got to know what a disciple is.

When you look in the New Testament you see the word disciple mentioned about 269 times. Just by way of contrast or comparison, you see the word Christian mentioned three times. “Disciple” is mentioned over and over and over again. What is a disciple? When the New Testament talks about disciples, it talks about disciples in different ways. I want you to see three main categories.

First of all when you see the New Testament talk about disciples sometimes it is referring to the casual listener - people who are in the crowds following Jesus, listening to what He is saying, the casual listener.

Then you take a step deeper and you see some people referred to His disciples more along the lines of being convinced listeners. By that I mean they are not just casually listening. There is some “buy-in” there. Okay, I believe what this guy is saying. I am embracing what he is saying. I am convinced He is who He says He is. So, you have got convinced listeners.

Then you have got a deeper level beyond that not just casual or convinced listeners, but you have got a committed life-long learner and follower described as a disciple in the New Testament.

What is interesting is that in the New Testament when we see all these references to disciples, the greatest number of people that are called disciples fall into one of those first two categories; either casual listeners or convinced listeners - thousands of people that would follow Christ. Many that had some “buy-in”. But when you take that third step and you get to committed life-long learners and followers, the group gets really, really small.

For example, in Acts 1:15, all it says is that after Jesus left this life on earth, ascended into heaven, there is only 120 people that are left. Thousands of people had followed Him during His life here but only 120 people that are actually doing what He told them to do, committed life-long learners and followers. Now, that is the picture in the New Testament.

Let’s take a step back and let me ask you a question. Where do think the largest number of people in the church, particularly in the Western World, fall into when it comes to these categories? I am guessing the first two. I can say with pretty good confidence, the majority, the multitudes, even who might call themselves Christians when it comes to this word “disciples”, would probably be classified as either casual listeners who say they can go along with this Jesus and the church thing or probably even more so particularly in our culture here in the Southeast, convinced listeners. A lot of people in our church culture that have ‘buy-in’, yes I believe Jesus is who He says He is, I believe this is true. They are content to go on living the Christian life as a convinced listener.

When you get to this idea of a committed lifelong learner and follower, you take a step much deeper and the number gets a lot smaller. I believe we have created a situation where we have created discipleship to be optional in the church. What it means to follow Jesus really and truly at its core, the deep foundations of what that means is relegated for the super Christian. Disciple – disciple making.... That is only a few over here and we have made it possible. We have created an atmosphere where it is okay to become a Christian

but not a disciple. We have relegated discipleship, really following Christ and radical devotion, over here and it is possible to be a Christian and have absolutely no progress in or toward discipleship in our lives. I think that is a problem biblically.

I am convinced when it comes to the need in the church today, because that picture is reflected in the stagnancy and spiritual weakness of the church across the Western world, I am convinced the need in the church today is not more money. It is not more power. It is not more prestige. It is not even more people. It is not more education. It is not more political influence. I believe the greatest need in the church today is more men and women and students who believe in Jesus Christ and embrace Him, to rise up and be the disciples Scripture teaches us to be. I am convinced it is not only the greatest need in the church. I think it is the greatest need in the world. I know that is a heavy statement. I think Dallas Willard said it best. Listen to this. He said:

The greatest issue facing the world today with all its heartbreaking needs is whether those who by profession or culture are identified as Christians, if they will become disciples, students, apprentices, practitioners of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from Him how to live the life of the Kingdom of heaven into every corner of human existence. Will they break out of the churches to be His church, to be His mighty force for good on earth, drawing the churches after them toward the eternal purposes of God and on its own scale, there is no greater issue facing the individual human being, Christian or not.

What I want to say to you this morning based on the authority of the Word of God, is I want to be a part of the church that is impacting the world with the goodness of Christ for the glory of Christ. I want to be a part of a body of believers that is not casual and convinced in our approach to Jesus but we are committed lifelong learners and followers of Him who are embracing Him and making Him known in Birmingham and all the world.

Now, before we get there, we need to take a look at what that means and to consider what it costs to be a disciple of Jesus. Come with me to Matthew 4. Look at verse 18. This is a passage that I am guessing is familiar to many of us. I pray that God will give us fresh eyes this morning to see and understand the mammoth truths that are located in this passage.

Look at verse 18:

*As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.' At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him (Matt. 4:18-22).*

Now Jesus comes on the scene here. This is probably not the first time these guys have met Jesus. A lot of people think that John 1 gives us the initial picture of these guys being introduced to Jesus. This may have been the second or third occurrence where they interacted with Him. But Jesus comes to them and he says two words: follow me. Literally, come after me. In those two words, we begin to unpack what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

## What Does It Mean To Follow Jesus?

### Radical Abandonment for the Glory of Christ

What does it mean to follow Jesus? First of all, it means radical abandonment for the glory of Christ. Now in order to see that, we need to look at the context that Matthew 4:18 and following comes in. So, back up with me to verse 12 and I want you to read with me there what leads up to this picture of Jesus initiating this follow-ship with these guys.

Matthew 4:12 says, *"When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: 'Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned'"* (Matt. 4:12-16). Now pay attention close to verse 17, *"From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near'"* (Matt. 4:17).

Now what we have got to realize is that this is the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. At the beginning of this chapter He is tempted, resists temptation and then He starts His public ministry. From the very beginning, one message resounds from His mouth. Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is near. That phrase is used, not just the whole phrase, but especially the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of heaven and is repeated over and over and over again throughout the book of Matthew.

It is not a kingdom as in a place. It pictures the rule and the reign and the dominion and the authority of God. Wherever His rule and reign is acknowledged and submitted to, there we see a picture of the Kingdom. That is what we see all throughout the book of Matthew.

Now, where do you get radical abandonment for the glory of Christ from there? What I want you to see is that over and over again as the Kingdom is mentioned, it is always accompanied by great cost, by great abandonment and sacrifice for the King. I want you to see that. Let me take you on a little tour. Turn one chapter over to Matthew 5. Maybe circle a few different times in the book of Matthew where you see the word Kingdom. I want you to see the abandonment, the sacrifice that it is associated with.

Look in Matthew 5:3, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* So in order to have the Kingdom of heaven or to inherit the Kingdom of heaven you have to be poor in spirit. Look down in verse 10, *"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 5:10). If you want the Kingdom of heaven you are persecuted because of righteousness. That is a sacrifice. There is a cost there. Well, it continues on.

Look over in Matthew 13 and we are skipping over tons and tons of incidences where the Kingdom is mentioned. Look with me at Matthew 13. Look at verse 44 with me. This is a couple of parables that Jesus used to talk about how we can inherit the Kingdom and what we would do, what we would give to be a part of this Kingdom, to experience the glory of His Kingdom. Look at chapter 13:44 - It says, *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it"* (Matt. 13:44-46).

Do you see the picture there in that parable? The Kingdom is worth selling everything you have got in order to get it - leaving everything behind. Let me show you a practical picture of that. Go over to Matthew 19. You mean literally give everything up, leave everything behind, and abandon everything to have the Kingdom? Look at Matthew 19:21. This is a story known as the rich young ruler or the rich young man. It is a man who had great wealth, many possessions. He comes up to Jesus and says how can I inherit the Kingdom? How can I have eternal life? What does Jesus say in verse 21? *"If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me"* (Matt. 19:21). Give away everything you have got. Verse 22, *"When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth"* (Matt. 19:22). This is a huge message for us. All of us in this room are incredibly wealthy compared to the rest of the world.

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, 'Who then can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.' Peter answered him, 'We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us' (Matt. 19:23-27)?*

"We have abandoned everything."

*"Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first'" (Matt. 19:28-30).*

Do you see the cost of the Kingdom here? Let me show you in one other gospel. Look over in Luke 9. I want you to look with me at verse 23. Unpacking what it would mean to abandon everything for the Kingdom, the glory of Christ. Look at this. Luke 9:23. Jesus has got people following Him. So what does He say in verse 23?

*Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God' (Luke 9:23-27).*

Come after me, deny yourself, take up your cross, follow me. You lose your life for the Kingdom. Some of you will not taste death until you enter the Kingdom of God.

Same chapter over in verse 57, some guys come up to Jesus. They are eager to be His disciples. We want to follow you. Look in verse 57. *"They were walking along the road, a man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go"* (Luke 9:57). Here is a prospective disciple. What does Jesus say? *"Jesus replied, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head'" (Luke 9:58).* No shelter. That which

you consider indispensable, you sacrifice for the Kingdom. *"He said to another man, 'Follow me.' But the man replied, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim'"* (Luke 9:59-60)—the what? *"The kingdom of God."* Verse 61, *"Another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.' Jesus replied, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God'"* (Luke 9:61-62). Abandoning family, even in time of need right there. Let the dead bury their own dead. Abandoning comfort and shelter.

Let me show you one more. Look at Luke 14. I want you to see... look with me in verse 25. This is context in verse 15 where Jesus begins to talk about the Kingdom of God and it comes to verse 25. Let these words soak in. *"Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple"* (Luke 14:25-27).

Are you getting a glimpse here of what it means to follow Jesus? To be a disciple of Jesus? Anyone who does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, or his brothers and sisters, even his own life cannot be my disciple. What does that mean?

Come back to Matthew 4 and we have got this picture. Think of how all of that was being played out in their lives. Look at the cost. What Jesus is teaching us here is that as His disciple, we leave behind all things. We leave behind all things and it takes place in various ways in this little passage in Matthew 4. Think about what these guys were leaving behind.

First of all, we leave behind our comfort, all that was familiar to them, all that was comfortable to them, all that was natural for them they are now leaving behind. We leave behind our comfort. We leave behind our careers. These guys were completely leaving behind their profession as fisherman. It was a radical reorientation of their entire way of life. What would that look like for you to leave behind your entire way of living for a completely different way of living because of simply being a disciple of Christ? They left behind their careers.

Third, our possessions. It is at this point that we have this over exaggerated picture of the socioeconomic level of the disciples. Many times we think of them as very poor and they certainly weren't elite and incredibly wealthy but they did have a very solid business as fishermen, had property, had boats, able to do this, had what they needed to carry out that business. They weren't well off. But at the same time, they were not the peasants of their day either. They had a lot to lose when it came to leaving their nets behind. So they have got a lot to show us in a modern world today.

You can't be a disciple of Jesus and love your house, love your car. You can't be a disciple of Jesus and love your possessions, your TV, your stereo system. You can't be a disciple of Jesus and hold on to any possession in this world.

Our comfort, our careers, our possessions, our position, and this is one of those areas where we have got to understand that in this day, people would attach themselves to rabbi's in order to promote their position. You would find a great teacher and you would go learn from him so that you could become like him and then move on to a greater teacher. Move on to a greater place and so this was a way that you gain more social status. You climb the ladder. Does that sound familiar? Jesus says, you come to me, you don't climb the

ladder, you take steps down. It is not about position here. The Son of Man doesn't even have a place to lay His head.

We abandon our comfort, our careers, our possessions, our position, our family—man this is heavy! These guys left their father, Zebedee. We know from other clues in the Gospels that many of these disciples had wives. Now, did Jesus call them to leave their wives and never see them again? No. But He did call them, and I think we see much evidence throughout the New Testament of these guys spending even large times away from their family as they followed Jesus. Their devotion to Jesus would supersede even the closest family relationship there is.

Our family, our friends, those who they know best, our safety. It is not a good thing when the rabbi, the teacher says, "I send you out like sheep among the wolves." That is not an encouraging thought. "As you go guys"—Matthew 10—"I just want you to know, all men will hate you because of me." They are starting to look at each other. "Are we sure we should sign up for this thing?" He continues on... "If they persecute me, they are going to persecute you too." That is not good news when you see Jesus going to a cross. Their safety was completely abandoned.

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, please don't miss it. Going to the darkest places of the inner city and the most dangerous places of the world is not a question, is it safe? That is no longer a concern for a disciple of Jesus. Why? Because it is abandonment where we leave behind ourselves. Anyone who will come after me, he must deny himself, even his own life, Luke 14. Everything in our culture is about promoting self, protecting self, preserving self, taking care of self and Jesus comes on the scene and He says, "Slay yourself. You die and give your life." This was a counter-cultural message in Matthew 4 and it is counter-cultural message 2,000 years later, that you leave behind all things.

What would happen? What would happen if one of us in this room did exactly what we see happening in Matthew 4 today? What would happen if you did that? Think about it. If in a matter of an instant you leave behind your entire profession, your whole career of which your life is about, you leave behind your family for extended periods of time? You leave behind all your possessions, you let them completely go and you begin to follow. Nothing, house, home, car - nothing. People would think you were crazy. People would think you have lost it. Religious fanatic. Even your family would think you don't care about them. I know that because in small ways, I have seen it.

I travel to student conferences, college conferences and Christian students praying about making the gospel known in other countries and other context of the world and the number one thing they say is, how can I tell my Christian parents that I want to go over there? They don't want me to go. They want me to continue and get more education and get a nice job and have a nice home and family and establish myself and they want what is best for me they say. When what is best for me according to Scripture is that I deny myself, I take up my cross and I follow Him. How do I reconcile that? Being a disciple of Jesus is a radical abandonment of all of these things.

Now, some of you are thinking, "Dave, you have lost your lid? I don't know what happened over the holidays, but what do you mean, abandon all of these things? Our careers, our possessions, our position, our family, our safety, ourselves? What do you mean?" Think about it practically. How does this look practically? Jesus may not call all of us to leave our possessions this week, every single thing we own. He may not call you to leave your profession this week and what you have built your whole life revolving around doing, or to

say my family is going to be in the background of my devotion to Jesus in the ways that these disciples did.

But what He is showing us here and what this means is that all of those things in our lives we hold so loosely to, so loosely, and we grip, we cling to so tightly the person of Jesus Christ and the glory of the Kingdom of God and we live for that. And if that means we let go of these things, we are glad to do it because we are embracing Christ with all of our hearts. That is radical abandonment for the glory of Christ. What if He did call you to do some of these things specifically? What if He did?

Then, think about a whole other level, how does this look practically? Remember, the Kingdom of God, His rule, His reign, what happens when we take every facet of our lives, all these things and we bring them under His rule and under His reign, it radically changes the way our lives look. Our comfort is now under His reign and if He chooses to give us comfort, then God be glorified in that. But if He takes it away and gives us suffering, God be glorified in the suffering we experience. Our comfort, our careers, my whole life as an accountant, or as a teacher, as a lawyer, as a doctor, is now brought under the rule and the reign of God, and I live as a doctor to make His Kingdom and His glory known in every single day, 8:00 to 5:00 of my job or whatever it may be. Your career now comes under His rule and His reign. It is not about making more money, and it is not about being the most successful. It is about exalting the glory of God in that workplace.

Our possessions, what happens when we don't live like the rest of our culture to get? We live to give our possessions for the Kingdom of God – our position, our family. What happens when Jesus is the supreme affection in our life? It changes the way we love our lives. It changes the way we love our husbands. It changes the way we lead our families, and His Kingdom is evident in our homes – all of those things, our friends, our safety. When we stop saying, I can't do that because it is not safe and start saying God whatever you have me do whether in my life or in my death, glorify your name and your Kingdom.

Some of you are sitting here thinking, why would I want to do that? Let's be honest, Dave. I may not say it out loud but I am at least thinking, I can be a Christian forgiven of all my sins because of what Jesus did on the cross for me and live here on this earth with eternal security and I can live and enjoy the pleasures of this life and then because I have been saved and forgiven of my sins, I know I am guaranteed to enjoy the pleasures of eternal life. So why would I want to take this step and go from being a casual or convinced listener and be a committed lifelong learner and follower? Why would I want to abandon all these things? Why would I want to go so radical? Haven't you heard, Dave? Christians aren't expected to be radical. They are not perfect, just forgiven. Right?

I don't buy it. I don't buy it because it is not biblical. We are not just forgiven. Yes, praise the Lord, praise God my salvation is completely dependent on the work of Jesus Christ on a cross and there is nothing, absolutely nothing I can do to earn my salvation or merit salvation. He does that all for me. It is free and it is gracious! But the very purpose of my salvation, the very essence and purpose of Christianity is not to save me, not just to save me from my sins.

Did you catch that? The purpose of your salvation is not to save you from your sins. That is an American gospel and it is a diluted gospel. The purpose of our salvation is not to save us from our sins. We have created a Christianity and a gospel that centers around us where everything is made to be on my achieving forgiveness of sins through Christ and so when Jesus died on the cross, He died just for me. And while I in no way want to take away from the extremely personal nature of God's mercy and love and grace for every single one of

you in this room, I do want to say to you this morning that when Jesus died on the cross, He did not die just for you. He died, Luke 24:47-49, so the repentance and the forgiveness of sins would be preached in all nations so the Kingdom of God would be proclaimed among the whole earth. That is why He saved us from our sins. He saved us from our sins to make His glory and His grace and His majesty and His mercy known throughout Birmingham and the world. That is why He saved us. We are not just forgiven. We are part of a purpose to magnify the glory and the Kingdom of God.

So we leave behind all things and we live for one thing. What do we live for? We live for the honor of the King! That is the thing that drives us. We wake up in the morning and we say, "God, make the glory of the King known through me." I live for the honor of the King. We have to see this. This is a radically different way to look at Christianity.

I have the contrast there and some might think I am being a little too stereotypical here and I am overstating the case. But I don't think I am. American Christianity, I believe at its core, is radically self-centered where everything centers around us. I am convinced if we begin to look at Scripture and what it means to follow Christ, we will discover that biblical disciple-making is radically God-centered because now the purpose of our salvation is not just us. The purpose of our salvation is to show the grace and mercy of Christ to all the people around us to reproduce that in people's lives throughout Birmingham and the entire world. He is our motivation. He is our goal. Everything revolves around Him.

You will not see in the Gospels, in the New Testament for that matter, you will not see a people who are satisfied to receive forgiveness at Jesus' expense and go on living in a casual acquaintance with Him. That is not biblical. Radical abandonment for the glory of Christ.

### **Radical Dependence on the Grace of Christ**

All right. We are diving in deep. Let's go another step. Not only radical abandonment for the glory of Christ, but second, radical dependence on the grace of Christ.

Now here is where it gets really good. When you get to Matthew 4:18 it says, As Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee, and He happened upon these guys, these four guys, we see Him call them to Himself. "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." What we are seeing there is a process, the process that He is about to take these guys through for the rest of their life. A journey that He is about to take them on and the process that is initiated here in Matthew 4:18 has a lot to teach us about the process He does in our lives. I want you to think about it in three steps or three levels.

In our lives, first of all in Matthew 4, Jesus takes the initiative to choose us. He takes the initiative to choose us. This is so very different from the way things worked in that day. What you had was a rabbi who was well respected and potential disciples would come to him and ask to be taught by him, asked to be under his tutelage, his learning. If you were a student you would go and seek out a rabbi who would help you most advance yourself. You would seek that out. What we are seeing here is not these guys going to Jesus. We are seeing Jesus going to these guys. The teacher is initiating the relationship. It is what we see all throughout Scripture; God choosing his partners—Abraham, Noah, Moses, David, the prophets, even Israel, the nation of the people of God itself chosen to be a royal priesthood, a kingdom of priests with God.

In the Gospels you see this in Matthew 4 and you get to John 15, what does He say? "You did not choose me, I chose you. I chose you and I appointed you." What we are seeing is a radical picture of the grace of Jesus Christ in initiating the relationship with these guys. I

want to remind you that not one of us in this room is able to be a follower of Christ apart from the initiative and grace of a gracious God who reached out His hand into your life and into my life. Not one of us deserves to be here this morning. We are here because He has chosen to pour out His grace on us.

It is at this point where many sermons I have heard on Matthew 4 and many commentaries I have read on Matthew 4 begin to talk about how Jesus chose these disciples, these fishermen to be His disciples because of all the qualifications that fishermen have. They have this perspective or that perspective, they are used to doing this or that and that would be good for His Kingdom. So they start talking about all the characteristics of fishermen and how that is good for them to be disciples. But, if we go there, then we miss the whole point of this passage. Jesus did not initiate this conversation with these guys, this relationship with these guys because of anything they brought to the table. He actually initiated the conversation because they brought absolutely nothing to the table. They weren't the sharpest tools in the shed.

Let's think about it. Galileans, the social outcasts of the day, is literally the way this picture plays out. These are the commoners, the nobodies, the guys from out in the country that people just don't spend a lot of time around. They certainly weren't the elite. Many teachers would draw the elite to them of noble birth. These guys don't fill that qualification. Even spiritually, these guys are not that sharp spiritually. They were pretty arrogant, pretty narrow-minded for a world-wide mission. These guys were pretty ethnocentric focused on the Jewish people, constantly bickering with each other. You always see them as a burden throughout the Gospels, to Jesus. Jesus didn't call them because of what they brought to the table. He took the weakest and the lowliest and those who nobody would have expected and He chose them, and His plan hasn't changed.

So how does that make you feel? Is that encouraging to us? In First Corinthians 1 Paul says, "God has chosen you, the foolish things of the world. He has chosen the weak things of the world." Is He talking about us? He literally says the things that are not, like you are not even there. It is not a compliment in 1 Corinthians 1. So, I may not even be building you up by telling you that God chose you. You are in here actually because of your weakness, because of the very few things you bring to the table.

One of the favorite guys that I have studied in the past which lived in the second century was a critic of Christianity and I want you to hear what he said. This is one of my favorite quotes from him. He is a critic. He criticized Christianity – atheist. He said, "If any man is ignorant, if any man is wanting in sense and culture, if anybody is a fool, let him become boldly to become a Christian. We see them in their own houses, the worst, the most vulgar, the most uneducated persons. They are like a swarm of bats, or ants, creeping out of their nests or frogs holding a symposium around a swamp, or worms convening in mud." That is what he thought of Christians. Ladies and gentleman, welcome to the worm convention this morning.

Not one of us is in here because of what we bring to the table. We are in here because of our weakness and that puts us all in the same plane and we have a God who delights in showing His power in our weakness, His strength when we are weak and that is good news. That makes us completely dependent on His grace. Not one of us is qualified. Not one of these guys was qualified.

So what does He say to them? Follow me and I will make you. He doesn't say follow me and go be fishers of men. That is not what He says. He says, "I will make you fishers of men." These guys were anything but passionate about the Kingdom of God at this

point. They did not have any clue what the Kingdom involved. But Jesus would go through a process with them where He not only takes the initiative to choose us, but He provides the power to use us and He would impart compassion and gentleness and humility. He would give them these things. He would enable them to proclaim the Kingdom. It was His work in them.

Now why was it designed that way? Why did Jesus do that? He takes the initiative to choose us and provides the power to use us so that He gets the glory through us. This is the great thing when you look at the disciples' lives from Matthew 4 to Acts 1 and 2, the beginning of the New Testament church. There is a process whereby these guys go from being completely unfit for the Kingdom to being powerful in the Kingdom of God, proclaiming the gospel with great power.

Peter, the guy with a foot shaped mouth comes to Acts 2 and he stands up and he preaches the first Christian sermon and 3,000 people plus were saved. The church grew by over 2,500% in one day through that man.

John – always wanting to debate who was going to be the greatest. Jesus takes him and he writes these books that we have in the New Testament that are leading people to Christ 2,000 years later. All the other guys, Phillip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Andrew, James and how they scattered out to literally turn their world upside down, Act 17:6. Watch what these guys did. Their whole lives were a testimony to His glory. Jesus designed it so that in the end only His power could be the answer for why they were used like that.

This is good news for us. Here is why. I am convinced that across this room there are men, women, students, where the adversary has convinced you that you have too many shortcomings and too many weaknesses, too many failings to be used mightily for the Kingdom of God and they render you useless. Maybe not useless, but at least not as useful as some other people in the church. I want to remind you that if that is what you believe, it is lie straight from the devil because the beauty and the truth of God's Word is that it is our shortcomings and our weaknesses and the things that we are not good at that are actually the exact tool that God uses to show His power and His glory and His strength most clearly through you. So we rejoice in our weaknesses the New Testament says. That is weird. Why do we rejoice in our weakness? Because when I am weak, He is strong! So God takes us and He uses us to show His glory through us.

What this means is from this point on, draw a line in the sand. From this point on it is not permissible for anyone from The Church at Brook Hills to ever say the statement: "I cannot impact nations for the glory of Christ." We can't say it anymore that it would never be said when we gather together, we cannot impact nations for the glory of Christ because here is the deal. That statement sounds humble and it sounds self-effacing—"I can't do it." But at the core, that is a prideful statement because what you have said is I deny the power of Christ in me to accomplish His purpose for me. We are going to stop denying the power of Christ. We are going to start experiencing the power of Christ for the purpose of Christ. We are going to say, "You have taken the initiative to choose us, provide the power to use us and God get the glory through us."

Our prayer, my prayer—God, make us a trophy of your grace. That is the prayer for my life. I want my life to be a trophy of His grace. People look at my life and say only God could take that and produce that. I want this church, I want our church to be a trophy of His grace. To where there is no question a few years from now when people say, "If God can take that group and do that through them, then He can definitely do it in your life." It is that His glory might spread.

## **Radical Adherence to the Person of Christ**

Radical abandonment for the glory of Christ and radical dependence of the grace of Christ. Third, following Jesus, discipleship at its core, is radical adherence to the person of Christ.

Jesus says, follow me and we have got to see how personal this is. In light of the context of that day, what you would do with a rabbi or a teacher, is you would go and you would sit and you would learn information; you would learn dogmas and rules, procedures and regulations, teachings and then you would follow those teachings. So you would constantly listen and then try to do those things.

But that is not what Jesus is doing here. What I want you to see is the essence of Jesus' method. First of all, Jesus is going to train all these guys. How is He going to do it all? First of all—no formal school. There is not going to be a formal school to train these guys. If I am going to train guys to impact the world, he said no formal school. Second—no seminaries. You don't see seminaries anywhere in the New Testament. That means that we can't say "Well, if I had had a seminary education then I could do more things". Absolutely not. We are not against seminaries. Third—no membership classes. At no time were they signed up as a member in this discipleship group. No highly organized procedures or formulas. We don't see that anywhere.

Don't miss it. Jesus was His own school and curriculum, His person. And as a follower of His, you didn't just go listen to His teachings. You don't just go and listen to the laws and dogmas that you need to follow now. Instead, you give yourself to a relationship with Him and you stick to His person, you adhere to Him, you associate with Him. It is not information being disseminated. It is a relationship with individuals being poured out, Jesus investing His life into others lives. It is not a list of rules you need to follow. It is a picture of walking with Christ and this is huge.

Even in the way we think about learning and discipleship, we often think of a classroom and learning teachings and now we go out and do them. At the core, that is not what Jesus is modeling for us here. It is not what disciple-making is about. Disciple-making centers, not around a classroom or a seminary or religious rules and procedures that we follow. Disciple-making revolves around the person of Jesus Christ and our relationships with each other.

Two implications of Jesus' method. Don't miss them. First of all, we are free. Ladies and gentlemen, we are free from legalistic ritualism. We do not come in here this morning to get a bunch of rules and laws to follow and go out and do them this week and then come back next week and try and do some more and more and more and more and more. We walk with Christ. Now, that doesn't mean we ignore His commands. No. But what we do is we come in here this morning and we delight, we lift our hearts to the person of Christ. We lift our lives to Him and we say, "God, Jesus, I walk with you. Enable me to obey your commands." Then His message, "If you love me you will obey my commands," begins to make sense. Not, "Earn my love," but, "Experience my love as you walk with me."

We are free from legalistic ritualism and we all know how easy it is for our Christianity to quickly deteriorate into legalism. It is following, doing the drill and misses the whole point. You are free from legalistic ritualism and second—we are focused on building individuals, not an institution. We are focused on building individuals, not building an institution.

Jesus comes on the scene and He says—"I am not setting up an organization here." He has got—scholars think at the most time—about three years of public ministry. Out of three years He says, "I am not going to set up one organization. I am not setting up an organization. I am setting up relationships." I have got a feeling, if He were here today, He

would scream out to us, "Don't give the world an organization. Give the world relationships. In light of all the needs in the world, out of all the needs in Birmingham and the mammoth needs of a lost and dying world, don't give an organization or institution to them. Give yourselves. Don't build up programs and procedures and certainly don't spend all your time fighting in the church over programs and procedures."

Give the world the person of Christ displayed in your personal relationship with Him. Now we are starting to get at what disciple-making is all about. Can I say to you this morning that as the pastor of this church, I do not live for the institution and the survival of The Church at Brook Hills. We don't live for the institution and survival of The Church at Brook Hills. I live, we live, for the individuals in this room and the individuals outside this room who don't know about the glory of Christ and men and women in the entire world. That is who we live for. That changes our Christianity. Radical adherence to the person of Christ.

### **Radical Trust in the Authority of Christ**

Fourth, radical trust in the authority of Christ. Following Jesus. If we had time, I would go over to Luke 5 at this point. Let me just give you a synopsis of what happens there. It is the parallel account that Luke gives us of this occurrence—many scholars believe—in Matthew 4. These fishermen have been fishing all night and they have caught nothing. They come in the morning and nothing to show for it. Jesus comes up and He says, "Why don't you let your nets out and catch some fish?" "Thanks genius, but we have already tried that and it didn't work. There are no fish out there. We are just going to pack up our nets and move on." Jesus says, "Let out your nets." So they go back out. All of a sudden, fish filled their nets and they have got to bring another boat over to bring all the fish in. They realize something in that moment that would transform their relationship with Jesus. They realize Jesus knew a lot more about fishing than they did because He created the fish and the water and the fishermen. He could be trusted with His authority, with His dominion and His power.

Now, fast forward 2,000 years later. I am guessing the majority of us in this room are not fishermen by trade or occupation. We have many different occupations represented around this room. I wonder, if Jesus was here today, He might not ask us, "Why don't you respect me more in your area of work and your area of study and your expertise?" Because here is what we do. We relegate Jesus over to the side here. We disassociate Him from intellectual capacity and we put Him over here in the religious and the spiritual realm and when it comes to managing a business, when it comes to creating a network of computers, when it comes to leading a classroom, when it comes to handling litigation, when it comes to selling stocks, we are on our own.

But it is not the case! That is not the case. Jesus has all authority. This is something I would love for us to explore in the future some more. But suffice to say at this point, in the New Testament Church, these early Christians, Colossians 2:9 says we believe in Christ there is all wisdom, and all knowledge. So He can be trusted with every thing in our lives.

In your notes there, He is master of every domain in our lives. He is the master of every domain in our lives. This is where the Kingdom of God and the mission of God to make disciples of all nations will begin to take hold when people of all kinds of different occupations in this room and all kinds of different family situations and social situations and economic situations begin to let Jesus be King at the center of every domain in our lives. He knows! He knows what we need to do, how we need to lead, how we need to work to glorify His name. Not just at business—at home.

Guys, He understands your wives better than you do. That is good news! Women, He understands your husbands completely. Believe it or not, He is powerful enough to understand them. He understands your children. Students, kids, believe it or not, the God of the universe does understand what is going on in your parents minds, lives. He has all authority. If He is master of every domain in our lives, then He must be Lord of every detail in our lives. This is where following Jesus begins to infuse our day-to-day life. It is not just a Sunday or a spiritual, or even quiet time thing over here. What it is a reality in every second of our day. Radical trust in the authority of Christ.

### **Radical Obedience to the Mission of Christ**

Radical obedience to the mission of Christ. Now the mission we know—"Follow me and I will make you"—what? "Fishers of men." Okay, we got Matthew 4:19 probably memorized this morning so mark that one off, okay? Fishers of men – that is the mission here.

Now what I want you to see is how unconventional this plan is. Think about it, the unconventional plan of Jesus. If He has got three years to create a worldwide movement for the glory, the Kingdom of God in three years, how is He going to do it? Get together a public relations specialist and some other folks and draw together the largest crowd? Start doing some conventions. Get this thing as wide and as far as quickly as possible. Bring all the multitudes together. But that is not what Jesus did.

He would have multitudes, masses of people following Him and He would turn around and say, "By the way, unless you hate your father and mother, you can't follow me" and they are all gone. Just like that. The disciples look at each other, "What was that about?" Next time they get a crowd following them, James turns to John, "He is probably going to say the hate your father and mother thing and they are going to be gone. I don't understand it."

Now is that because Jesus didn't have compassion or care for the masses or the multitudes? No. But the genius of His strategy and His life and discipleship was He would pour His life into a few men who would pour their lives into a few, who would impact eventually the masses for the glory of Christ 2,000 years later. Jesus knew what He was doing. That is why when we get a hold of disciple-making and begin to follow Jesus' example and do what He has shown us how to do as we study it over the next few weeks, when we begin to do that, then we can say, "I am impacting nations for His glory." We can be a part of impacting the masses for His glory by doing what? By making disciples. Man this is too good not to be a part of.

So, these guys were unhesitant in their response. Matthew 4:19, 20, 21 and 22—"at once they got up and followed Him." Immediately it says later on in the passage. Same word in the Greek, different translation here. But what we have got is immediately, right then, they got up and followed Him. These guys, they lacked a lot of things. But one thing they had was obedience. Their hearts were fired and ablaze for Jesus and their minds were gripped with the mission to establish the Kingdom on earth that Jesus of Nazareth would be the King of. That mission compelled them. It gripped their entire destiny of life. It drove them and I am convinced that in the church today we have stalled, and we have left this mission. I want to challenge us to rise up and at once, immediately take hold of this mission.

The ultimate question for the church is this: will we obey His plan? Will we obey His plan? That is the ultimate question. This is the good news. It is good news for the pastor who has now been pastor a grand total of six months and who is trying to figure out what this looks like. This is good news because we don't have to come up with a new strategy or new plan or new method throughout the years, throughout the centuries, year after year, century after century. The church comes up with new plans, new methods. Let's sacrifice them all to

the method Jesus has given us and let's say we are not going to come up with a new plan or new program. We are going to give ourselves to the plan that we already know Jesus has promised by His own very character to bless. He will bless the church that is giving itself to make disciples of all nations – guaranteed, based on the Word of God. So I say we obey the plan that has been revealed to us and expect His blessing, take Him at His word and see Him show His glory through His plan.

What is the plan? How do you do this? Well, we follow Him and as you follow Him you say to others, follow me. Don't miss it. Christianity just went to a whole new level and understanding right there. Now, following Christ is not about my life and what is going on with me. Now, my relationship with Christ, I am accountable for showing others too. I am accountable for leading others to see His goodness, His glory, His grace and His mercy. Christianity is now shifting from being self-centered to others-centered for the glory of being God-centered.

Now that is a huge statement. We are supposed to say – don't miss it – we are supposed to be able to say to people in the community around us in Birmingham, follow me. Follow me and you will be following Christ. That is exactly what the New Testament teaches us. 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul says, "Imitate me, follow me as I follow Christ," and I believe it is high time for the church to raise up and stop shirking the responsibility we have to show the glory of Jesus Christ to the people around us; to show His goodness and His grace, His mercy and His care and His compassion and His Word. It is time for us to rise up and take responsibility for the reason for which we have been saved. Follow me as I follow Christ.

## **Will We Follow Jesus?**

### **Consider the Cost of Discipleship**

Well, there it is. It comes down to the question, "Will we follow Jesus?" I want to challenge you to consider two things: first of all, consider very seriously the cost of discipleship. Radical abandonment to His glory, radical dependence on His grace, adherence to His person, radical trust in His authority, radical obedience to His mission. Your life is not your own anymore. You have surrendered every right to determine the direction of your life. That is a great cost.

### **Consider the Cost of Non-discipleship**

But lest we focus completely on the cost of discipleship, I want to challenge you also to consider the cost that I think is much greater and that is the cost of non-discipleship. "What do you mean, non-discipleship?" I want to challenge you to consider the cost. What if we don't give ourselves to follow Christ and let others follow us? What if we don't give ourselves to make disciples of all nations? What if we sit back as The Church at Brook Hills for the next 10 or 20 years and coast and live out the American dream and enjoy the pleasures of this world and maybe even grow as a church and leave the mission on the side? With our eternity secure, what if we take that route?

Well there is a cost there for us and the cost for us is we will miss out on the peace and the grace and the power and the mercy that God desires to show us, and that God desires for us to experience. We will miss out on His very presence, Matthew 28:20. We will miss out big time on the abundance that Jesus came to give us.

Not just us. The cost is also for our community. If we coast out and ignore the mission and the city of Birmingham gets a great institution called The Church at Brook Hills that people come to once a week but that has little to no real effect on the social spiritual conditions of

people living throughout Birmingham, Alabama and they miss out on seeing His glory and thousands miss out on coming to know His grace.

Not just for us and not just for our community, but to consider the cost of non-discipleship for the world. If we coast, then next year, 47 million more children are born into un-reached people groups that have no knowledge of the gospel and the next year 47 million more and the next year 47 million more and the next year 47 million more. And while 100's of millions of people in the world go on without having even heard the name of Jesus, we sit here thousands of miles away and have our comfortable services, business as usual Sunday after Sunday. Yes, the cost of discipleship is great but I am deeply convinced that the cost of non-discipleship is much greater. So which will we pay?

As I was studying this text and praying for you and praying for where we are heading, I knew that this text would be a foundation, not just for the next six weeks, but for the rest of this year and where we are headed. So I wanted to give us a way this morning to in a practical way play out what we have seen in Matthew 4. Now, we acknowledge that very few of us, if any of us, will do exactly what they have done here today when you look at that list of things to abandon. But I do want to invite you to say I am ready to go from being a casual or convinced listener to being a committed lifelong learner and follower of Jesus Christ and let Him make me these things.

You don't have to be there now. You have to be willing to go there. We need to be reminded that Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Christ has commanded us to make disciples. I want to give you the opportunity to say, "I am committing to more fully understand biblical disciple-making and to adjust my life to serve as a living example of Christ to others in 2007."

There are four different facets of what it means to practically make disciples that we are going to be diving in to over the next four weeks. I want to invite you, if you are willing to make this commitment and if you are not there today, then that is okay – let God bring you there. But considering the cost of what we have seen, if you are willing to make that commitment, I want to invite you to pray, "God I want to follow you with all that entails and I want you to make me a fisher of men."

God, I thank you for your grace, the initiative that you have taken to pour out your mercy on us and to call our names. All praise and honor and glory be to you, Jesus Christ for the cross you went to. So we pray you would make us a people who would deny ourselves, who take up our crosses today and follow you. You would make us a church that is radically surrendered, abandoned to you and your mission and that in this time over the next few minutes, you would solidify that in our hearts as we respond by your grace and obedience to your Word. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

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