

## **Kingdom: A Journey Through Matthew**

Two Simple Words

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### **Two Simple Words Matthew 4:12-25**

If you have His Word—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open with me to Matthew 4. We'll start in a minute in verse 12 and I would invite you to pull out those notes from your worship guide. While you're turning I want to express appreciation to God for Derek and his preaching of the Word last week. And to thank you for praying for me as I preached downtown on Martin Luther King weekend at a predominantly African-American church. It was good to be with our brothers and sisters there on so many levels. It was truly one of the great honors that I've experienced in my—about—six years in Birmingham.

I was just freshly struck by the history of our city. A history of a city that used to be called—40, 50 years ago—"Bombingham" because of all the bombings and torching of black homes and churches in our city. Many of you know the story of how Martin Luther King was arrested amidst peaceful demonstration here, thrown into prison, put in solitary confinement and just a few days later received a published letter from eight white pastors in this city telling him he needed to stop working like he was for civil rights here. So for me—as a white pastor—to have the privilege with my family and some of our elders of worshipping with our brothers and sisters and celebrating the unity we have in Christ was truly a joy.

One take away that I would like to apply from New Rising Star Missionary Baptist Church to The Church at Brook Hills—our African-American brothers and sisters do not view preaching as a passive spectator event during which you just sit back quietly and listen. Preaching for them is an active, participatory event where all throughout the sermon, that is a dialogue, not a monologue. "Amens", "Yes Lords," "Hallelujahs," shouting out left and right throughout the sermon. And I'm thinking we could use some of that. There you go, so you've got it in you. You've got it in you. Sometimes people come up to me after a sermon, they'll say, "Pastor I just wanted to stand up and shout out 'Amen' at this part or that part or all throughout." And I think to myself ... And I say to them, "Well why in the world didn't you?" Like, "Who's stopping you?" Scripture's certainly not. 1 Corinthians 14:16, it's almost expected that "Amens" will be firing left and right as we sing and we pray and we preach the Word of God.

So anyway, I know ... I was thinking about it; I think maybe you're hesitant to do that because you think that if you give me too much encouragement, I will be compelled to keep going on and on and on. And so let me just assure you that we will still honor the Lord and those who work in different capacities around this church with our time as we together affirm—whether we're praying or singing or in preaching—affirming the Word through "Amens." Sound good?

So alright; so looking for a little dialogue today as we come back to Matthew and to the official start of Jesus' ministry. So I want us to read this text, Matthew 4:12-25. And then I want us to consider what it means when Jesus says these two simple words, "Follow Me." And at the most basic level this morning I want us to see what it means to follow Jesus and

I want to ask every person in this room, "Are you following Him?" So if you could just let that question just hover over your seat, not the person next to you, beside you, in front of you, behind you, but are *you* following Him. Matthew 4:12-25:

*Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles- the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

*While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*

*And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.*

Let's pray. Father, even as we declared and sang just a few moments ago, we praise You in this room for Your patience and Your mercy, for Your grace and for Your glory. And we pray that over the next few moments Your Spirit would open our eyes—some for the very first time, for many of us, in a fresh way—to the reality of what it means to follow Jesus. Help us by Your Spirit to realize the wonder and the weight of what that means for our lives. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

## **Me...**

Alright, "Follow Me." You might underline it there in verse 19, those two words. What do they mean? I want to take them in reverse order. So first, who's the "Me" that's being followed here? What I want to do is just a quick review of all that we've seen over the last two months in the first four chapters of Matthew. Because Matthew has given us a glorious, majestic, stunning, just masterful picture of Jesus in four short chapters from all kinds of different angles.

### **Matthew 1**

So we saw in Matthew 1, remember the first verse of Matthew, "*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*" Loaded verse. From the beginning, Matthew is making clear that Jesus is the Savior—that's what Jesus means, the One who will save us from our sins. He is the Messiah—remember, Christ is not His last name? It

means “the promised One,” the One promised throughout the Old Testament. He is the Son of David, in the kingly line of David. And the Son of Abraham, father of the people of Israel. So a loaded first verse. We walk through the genealogy that follows to show how everything and everyone in the Old Testament was pointing us to Jesus the Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, Savior, Messiah. And then we saw in the last half of chapter one in His virgin birth that He is fully human and fully divine, born of the Spirit through a woman, unlike anyone else ever born. We saw the mystery and miracle of the incarnation. He is Immanuel, God literally with us.

## **Matthew 2**

So that was chapter one, then we turn the page to Matthew 2 where we saw Jesus is the Sovereign over the wise and the Shepherd of the weak. Wise men following constellations from the East to the West. We don’t know how many there were, but they came looking for a king. And when they found Him, they bowed down at His crib. At the same time we saw that quote from Micah 5:2-4 talking about how Jesus is the Ruler who would shepherd God’s people. Sovereign over the wise, Shepherd of the weak. And then we talked on Christmas Day about how He inaugurates the new exodus, remember God brings His Son out of Egypt to show His salvation. He ends the mournful exile and the weeping women of Bethlehem who’ve lost their baby boys. We see a picture of the hope that God had promised to women and families who were separated from their children during the exile. And He loves His fiercest enemies. We talked about how He came for the despised and the destitute, even those committed to destroying Him. He came for sinners like you and me. All of that in chapter two.

## **Matthew 3**

Then in Matthew 3, we saw Jesus proclaimed by John the Baptist as the Savior King and the Righteous Judge. *“Repent,”* John said, *“for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 3:2). The King is here, the King is coming, and He will save all who trust in Him. At the same time, the winnowing fork is in His hand and He will separate the grain from the chaff—all who do not turn from their sin and trust in Him—will burn with unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:12). Savior King and Righteous Judge. And then as John baptized Him, we saw that Jesus is filled with the Spirit and loved by the Father. In this rare glimpse we got into Heaven, we saw the very voice of God declaring, *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”* (Matthew 3:17).

## **Matthew 4**

Which then set the stage for His temptation in Matthew 4. We saw this two weeks ago as Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. We discovered that He is the new Adam and the true Israel. The new Adam—where the first Adam fell to temptation from the devil in the garden—Jesus, the New Man stood against that same serpent. He did what no one else in history has ever done or will ever do. He resisted temptation fully and completely, and did not give in once to sin. The new Adam and the true Israel. The faithful and obedient Son of God who passed the test of temptation, conquered sin and Satan.

All of that now leaves us in the last half of Matthew 4 where we see Jesus as the light of the world and the hope for all people. So here we’ve got another quotation at the beginning of the passage we just read. *“He [Jesus] went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled”* (Matthew 4:13-14). And then in verse 15 he quotes from Isaiah, Matthew does. Where is he quoting from? Isaiah chapter—look at your little note at the bottom—Isaiah 9:1-2. The context there in Isaiah 8 included a prophecy of coming judgment on God’s people. But then you get to chapter 9 and God promises that in the future He will send a

Deliverer who will be born of woman whose name will be called ... A child whose name will be called "*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*" (Isaiah 9:6). And that promise is given particularly to Jews who were living in Galilee at the time.

So they were away from the city center of Jerusalem, living in darkness among the nations and Isaiah says, "A light is going to dawn on you." So now, not by coincidence, Jesus withdraws into Galilee—Galilee of the Gentiles, a place where both Jews and Gentiles were living side by side both in spiritual darkness, and Matthew says, "A light has dawned on you (Matthew 4:16)." This is where Jesus will begin His ministry. Not in the city-center of Jerusalem, but in the outskirts, in Galilee, among the nations—where the despised dwell in the midst of darkness enveloped by the shadow of death. Here is One who is the Light of the world coming to you. And the Hope of all people—you go to the end of this passage and you see in verses 23-25 that Jesus is going throughout Galilee teaching, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and infirmity among the people. So you've got a three-fold ministry of Jesus we're being introduced here to: teaching, preaching and healing. And Matthew goes from the general to the specific. He's talking about the sick, those with disease and pain, then those who are pressed by demons, epileptics, paralytics and Matthew says He's healing them all. And so we see ministry in word and deed, side by side: proclamation of the good news of the kingdom and demonstrations of the greatness of the King right next to each other.

So this is the portrait we have of Jesus in Matthew 1-4. So when we come to Matthew 4:19 and we see Him approach four fishermen and say, "*Follow Me,*" we need to feel the wonder and the weight of the One who is offering this invitation, or some would say, giving this command. This is Jesus, the Savior, Messiah, Promised One from the kingly line of David and Abraham the father of Israel, fully human, fully divine, the One to whom wise men from the nations bowed down, whose birth is the culmination of generations and generations of prophecy and anticipation. He is the Savior King, Righteous Judge of the world, perfectly filled with the Spirit of God, perfectly loved by God the Father, the only man who has conquered sin, the true Son that Israel could never be, the Light of the World, the Hope for all people—do we realize who this is? And when we do, there is only one conclusion that is possible.

### **Conclusion**

When we think about these words, "*Follow Me,*" Jesus is clearly and absolutely worthy of far more than church attendance and casual association. Right? And we have this dangerous tendency to reduce Jesus to this poor, puny Savior who's just begging to be accepted into our hearts as if Jesus needs our acceptance. Jesus does not need your acceptance. He doesn't need my acceptance. He doesn't need us at all. We need Him. That's the whole point. And He's worthy of more than just church attendance, casual association. Do not patronize Him. Ladies and gentlemen, Birmingham, AL, Jesus is worthy of total abandonment and supreme adoration. This is no game that we are playing here on a Sunday morning in the South. We are talking this morning about the Savior King of the universe and the Righteous Judge of the nations, God in the flesh saying, "*Follow Me.*" But you just let it soak in, the thought alone is baffling. Mind-boggling when you realize Who's speaking here.

When Jesus comes to you and says, "*Follow Me,*" there's no potential for casual response here. It's either turn and run or bow and worship. You say, "Well these guys didn't bow and worship." Well you look at Luke's parallel account of this story—what most scholars think is the same account, Luke 5—that's exactly what Peter did as soon he realized Who Jesus was. He bowed in awe and worship, and then he rose and he followed Him. Everything would be different for these guys as a result of this initial encounter with this Jesus. Which is why we

know that people who profess to be Christians but whose lives look just like the rest of the world are lying. All kinds of people have supposedly made a decision, prayed a prayer, signed a card, walked an aisle, accepted Jesus into their hearts and yet their lives look no different. They say they're a Christian but the reality is they've never met Jesus because when you meet this Jesus, everything changes. And remember the Mack Truck? I've used the illustration before. If I were to get here late this morning—so we finish songs, music, Isaiah 48, we say it together and there's this quiet on the stage. I don't show and you sit there awkwardly for five, ten minutes. And then finally I come running out here and say, "I am so sorry to be late. I was coming over here this morning. I was driving on 459 and I got a flat tire, and I pulled over to the side of the road. I was fixing the tire and I accidentally stepped out into I-459 and a Mack Truck hit me. Just plowed me right over. And it hurt. So I got up, finished fixing the tire, got in the car and drove here, and that's why I'm late."

As I share that with you, you are thinking, "Clearly this is not true." Because you may not know a lot, but you know that if somebody gets hit by a Mack Truck they look different. How much more when a person comes face-to-face with the God of the universe in the flesh, the Savior King of the nations and the Righteous Judge of all peoples Who is sovereign over everything in the world—when you meet Him—you look different. Everything changes. It is not possible to look the same when you encounter the "Me" Who's here. I don't doubt that there are some men, some women, some students who are here in this room this morning who claim to be Christian but you have never met Christ. You've never realized Who He is and responded with your life. And I'm praying that today will be the day—in this room in the next few moments—where you see for the first time clearly and truly Who the "Me" that we're talking about in here is. And for the first time the Spirit of God prompts your heart to say to Him, "Yes I will follow You."

## Follow...

So then, what does that word, "follow" mean then? If this is the portrait of the One Who speaks, then what does it mean for those who respond? It means *everything*. I'm not saying—as we walk through this—these disciples knew everything that this meant for their lives. But I will maintain that these guys knew it meant their lives.

### **To live with radical abandonment for his glory.**

To follow Jesus means to live with radical abandonment for His glory. Now I used that word abandonment just a second ago, and I want to unpack that because this word, it takes us back to verse 17. And in a sense, back to the beginning of chapter 3 where John the Baptist said the exact same thing that Jesus is now saying. "*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matthew 3:2). We talked about this just a few weeks ago on New Year's Day. We talked about what this word *repent* means: to confess, to admit your sin, to express sorrow over your sin, contrition, to turn from your sin, conversion. We saw how repentance is illustrated in baptism, that baptism is a renouncing of yourself and dependence on yourself.

Now I want you to think about how that renouncing is playing out here in these disciples' lives. Abandonment. So think just in terms of these first disciples. What we're seeing here is that a call to Jesus involves a call to leave behind things. Immediately they are leaving behind things in both verses 20 and 22. "*Immediately they left their nets and followed him,*" verse 22, "*Immediately they left the boat...*" So it's a leaving behind. Think about what they were leaving behind—more than just nets or a boat. They were leaving behind comfort. We leave behind all things...our comfort. These guys leaving behind all that was familiar to

them, all that was natural for them, leaving certainty for uncertainty. Jesus did not say where they were going, just Who they would be with. That's huge.

Just a side note there—followers of Jesus don't always know the details about where they're going, but they always know Who they're with and that is sufficient. There's a whole sermon right there. Followers of Jesus, you may not always know the details about where you're going, but you always know the wonder of the One Who you're with.

We leave behind our comforts, our careers. This is an abandonment of profession for these guys—at least temporarily. And we're going to come back to how all this applies to us, but just see how it applied to them. These guys were completely reorienting their life's work around being a disciple of Jesus. Comfort, our careers, our possessions—they drop their nets. Now to be sure, these guys were not counted among the economically elite in their day, but the fact that they had this living, that they had a boat, successful trade as fishermen, shows us that these men did have much to lose in following Christ. And we hear that echoed in Peter's words in a place like Mark 10:28, "We've left behind all these things to follow You." So don't think, "Well they didn't have much to begin with." They absolutely had much—and we'll find out later, too, that they likely still had a boat that they would come back to and that sort of thing. But clearly as they followed Jesus here in Matthew 4, they were following Him with nothing in their hands.

Our possessions, our position. This is huge and it's one of the things that sets Jesus' disciples apart from other pictures of disciples and rabbis we might see in the first century. You see, it was common for disciples to attach themselves to a rabbi in order to assert themselves or promote themselves—in order to kind of move up the ladder so to speak. But this was not the case for these disciples. This was not a step up a ladder, this was a step down as they would eventually find out with Jesus—the One they were following—being tried and killed. We leave behind our position, our families. James and John leave their father. They're not the only ones told to do this in the New Testament. Remember Luke 9:61-62? "Don't even go back and say goodbye to your family." "*Follow Me*," Jesus tells the potential disciple there.

Our families, our friends, our safety. So here's a Teacher who will soon say to these men, "I'm going to send you out like sheep among wolves and all men will hate you because of Me and if they persecute Me, they will persecute you also (Matthew 10:16-23)." They were abandoning their safety. Obviously, following Jesus means abandoning our sin. It's the core of what it means to repent: to admit your sin, to be broken of your sin and to run from your sin. And all of this ultimately points to abandoning ourselves. This is the central message we see from the mouth of Jesus all throughout the New Testament—if anyone is going to follow Me, he must *what* himself? He must *deny* himself. In a world where everything revolves around self—promote yourself, protect yourself, preserve yourself, take care of yourself—Jesus says, "Slay yourself." Don't bite. Some of you have bought it. The idea that all you need to do is make a decision or pray a prayer, raise a hand to become a Christian and keep your life as you know it. That is not true. You become a follower of Jesus and you lose your life as you know it. Now in all of these things, I want to be very careful because I'm not saying—and I cannot or would not say based on the whole of the New Testament—that every follower of Jesus must lose or leave behind their career, sell or give away all their possessions, leave their family behind, physically die for the gospel—what some of these guys did.

But the New Testament is absolutely clear when it comes to these things. For all who follow Jesus, comfort and certainty in this world are no longer your concern. Your career revolves around whatever Jesus calls you to do and however He directs you to proclaim the good

news of the kingdom in the context of that career. Your possessions are not your own. Followers of Jesus do not live for more material pleasure in a 280 world [26:00]. You forsake material pleasure in this world as a follower of Jesus in order to live for eternal treasure in the world to come. And that could mean selling or giving away everything you have. Position no longer your priority.

When it comes to family, absolutely based on the whole of the New Testament, we are commanded to honor our parents, to love our wives or husbands, to provide for our children. So we should not take a passage like this to justify being a lousy husband or dad. At the same time, we're going to see in Matthew 10 that love for Christ should make love for our closest family look like hate in comparison. And when He calls you to do what all kinds of mid-termers across our church are doing this month and next month—leaving, going out, there are some who left last week, some who are leaving the next couple of weeks—to go for six months or a year or two years, leaving family, comfort, friends behind in order to make the gospel known in some of the most difficult places in the world. When you are a follower of Jesus that just makes sense. You go wherever He says to go, knowing that because self is no longer your god, safety is no longer your priority.

We resist sin; we risk our lives in obedience to Him. So the question is, "Are these things true in your life?" I mean, really true. Are you following Jesus? Because following Him involves leaving behind—maybe a better way to put it is to lay down all these things in order to live for one thing...to honor the King. To follow Jesus means to hold loosely to all of these other things: comfort, careers, possessions, and positions, family even, friends, safety, ourselves and to cling tightly to the person of Christ and the mission of His kingdom. Now for some of us that may sound extreme, but don't forget Who the "Me" is here. Right? To leave behind, lay down everything in your life, doesn't make sense until you realize Who the King is. And when you realize Who He is, laying down everything, leaving behind all things is the only thing that makes sense.

Remember Matthew 13:44, a verse we've come back to over and over and over again as a church. That man walking in a field comes upon a treasure that nobody else knows is there. He knows it's worth more than everything else he has put together. Nobody else knows it's there though, and so he goes and he sells everything he has in order to buy this field. People come up to him and say, "You're crazy, you're nuts! Why are you selling all your possessions in order to buy that field?" And he smiles and he says, "I've got a hunch." He smiles because inside he knows that he has found something that is worth losing everything for.

And that is the reality, Church at Brook Hills; we have found Someone Who is worth losing everything for. He's that good. He's that supreme. He's that great. And so this is the only thing that makes sense. Like, this ... "Yes, of course, why would I not lay down my safety and follow Jesus the Savior Who has conquered death? I have no reason to fear. Why would I live for possessions or stuff in this world? I've got treasure in the world to come. I'm living for Him!" It's the only thing that makes sense—when you realize Who the "Me" is—to live with radical abandonment for His glory. And—okay, so keep going here—this leads right into the next point.

### **To live with joyful dependence on His grace.**

To follow Jesus means to live with joyful dependence on his grace. And this is where I want you to see the beauty and the wonder of the grace of Christ in these words, "Follow Me." So here's the deal. First, Jesus takes the initiative to choose us. So I mentioned this earlier. It was common in first century Judaism for potential disciples to seek out a rabbi to study under. But the beauty of what's happening here in Matthew 4 is that these men aren't

coming to Jesus, Jesus is coming to them. Jesus is initiating the relationship. He is doing here at the beginning of the New Testament what God the Father has done all throughout the Old Testament. God always chooses His partners. He chose Noah. He chose Abraham. He chose Moses. He chose David. He chose the prophets. Deuteronomy 7:6—He chose the people of Israel.

Just as God the Father chose these people in the New (sic) Testament, now Jesus is choosing His disciples in the New Testament. He says later to them in John 15, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you." And He clearly did not choose these guys because of anything in them. It was all because of grace in Him. You see it's at this point where some commentaries that I've studied, they kind of go into all the reasons why Jesus wanted to choose fishermen. Because four, maybe—at least four, up to maybe seven—of his disciples had some experience in being fishermen. And these commentators will say, "Well fishermen do this or that, they have this skill or that skill, they have this perspective or that perspective." But if that's the direction we go, we'll miss the whole point of the text.

Jesus did not choose these guys because of what they brought to the table. These four guys right here—and the subsequent disciples who would follow—did not have a lot of things in their favor. Galileans: deemed lower-class, rural, uneducated, commoners, nobodies, not well-respected, certainly not among the culturally elite, hardly the most spiritually qualified for the task, exceedingly ignorant, narrow-minded, superstitious, and full of Jewish prejudices, misconceptions and animosities. And this is who Jesus chose. Now you might think, "Well you're being kind of hard on them," but the reality is, it's not just them. It's us too. You and I have nothing in us to draw Jesus to us. Nothing. Nothing in us that would provoke this kind of invitation.

We are sinners, rebels to the core, running from God. And the beautiful, gracious, glorious reality of the gospel is that Jesus has come running to us. He calls our name and He chooses us. To use the words of Ephesians 1:4-6, "[God] chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace." God the Father sent His Son to bear the wrath for sin that you and I deserve. To pay the penalty for our sins so that in His grace we might be drawn to Him. Praise be to God, He takes the initiative to choose us. We are not in this room because of what we bring to the table. We are in this room purely and solely because of His sovereign grace and mercy.

So why did He choose us? Well clearly the cause was not in us. The cause was totally in Him. But what about the purpose? Is there a purpose in Him choosing us? I'm glad you asked. Because in the same verse that He said in John 15:16, "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you,*" He says, "*I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.*" He chose us for a purpose. So cause—all His grace. Purpose—all His glory.

"*Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.*" Jesus takes the initiative to choose us and then—follow this—He provides the power to use us. This is great. Jesus does not command the disciples here to make fishers of men. He doesn't command the disciples here to fish for men. He says, "I'm going to *make* you a fisher of men." In other words, Jesus says, "I'm going to do a transforming work in your life that will enable you to spread My kingdom all over the world." It's the same thing He said—keep going back to John 15:4-5—when He said, "Remain in Me, I in you and you will bear fruit, but apart from Me, you can do nothing. I'm the One Who bears the fruit through you. I provide the ... I make you into a fisher of men." There's no way that these disciples would be able to carry out the commands that Jesus would give them in the pages that follow. That's the whole point. He was going to do

a transforming work in their life, provide the power to use them, so that in the end—follow this, He takes the initiative to choose us, He provides the power to use us, and as a result—He gets the glory through us.

Now don't miss how good this is. You think about just these men and the other disciples; who would've thought! So Peter—the disciple with the foot-shaped mouth—would preach the first Christian sermon and over 3,000 people would be saved in a day. The church would grow by 2,500% in a matter of minutes through Peter! John here is fishing. He's just fishing and he's the one who would write these letters. Gospel of John that we have 2,000 years later is powerfully being preached to lead sinners to Christ. James and Andrew and then others: Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew—whose words we're reading today—these guys would scatter to the nations proclaiming the good news of the kingdom.

These guys would literally alter the course of human history forever. It all started with four local fishermen. This does not look like a world-changing task force, but that's the beauty of God's design. All throughout history His design has been to take weak, humble, lowly, meek sinners—like Peter, Andrew, James and John and you and me—and to enable them to do far more than they or anybody else could ever imagine to the praise of His glorious grace. God, may it be so in my life. May it be so in this church. May this body be a community of brothers and sisters—ordinary men and women, undeserving men and women in Birmingham, AL—who by the grace of God, are used to affect nations for the glory of God. And may it be so.

So to follow Jesus is—yes, to live with radical abandonment for His glory—but to know that that's only possible in joyful dependence on His grace. Alright, I'm running out of time. We're going to have to fly here. So here we go. So I want be true to my word because you've been giving me a little dialogue, so here we go.

### **To live with faithful adherence to His person.**

To follow Jesus third is to live with faithful adherence to his person. So real briefly here, faithful adherence to His person. Adherence means—you know—"stick to." Because this word "disciple" is used almost over 250 different times in the New Testament but it doesn't always refer to these guys. Sometimes "disciple" refers to the crowds who were following Jesus and simply listening to what He's saying. Other times, that word "disciple" is used to refer to people who maybe even seem to be convinced that what Jesus is saying is true, but they're not "all in."

The reality is once Jesus does all this ministry in the north in Galilee and He starts to head south back down to Jerusalem where He will be killed on the cross, the only people who follow Him—the only disciples who are with Him all the way there and obviously they break off at the end—are these 12 guys and a few women. And so we realize—and we're going to see this next week at the end of the Sermon on the Mount—that nominal adherence to Jesus is not something new in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was prevalent in the first century. Throughout history there have been crowds of people who have been content to hear from Jesus—maybe even to agree with Jesus—but not to truly follow Jesus.

And I want to urge you this morning—especially in Birmingham, AL—not to be in that crowd. We know it is no big deal to sit in a church service in Birmingham, AL today. All kinds of crowds do that and as a result we've got a whole game going on to see who can draw the biggest crowd. But this is not New Testament Christianity. New Testament Christianity is a narrow road that is not easy, that is a costly road of continual obedience. And I want to urge you to take that path. I want to remind anyone who is or wants to become a follower of Jesus that we are not casual listeners who simply listen to the words of

Jesus week by week and then move on with our lives. We are not convinced listeners who are content to say, "Yes I believe in Jesus." Even demons believe Jesus is Who He says He is. Big deal. Intellectual belief alone ultimately damns. Followers of Jesus are not simply casual or even convinced listeners. Followers of Jesus are committed learners and followers. So in a world—even a church world—that is full of casual and even convinced listeners, I want to invite you to yield your life as a learner and a follower of Jesus willing to go wherever He asks, do whatever He says, no matter what it costs. Faithful adherents stick to His person. To follow Jesus is to live with faithful adherence to His person, and to live with total trust in his authority.

### **To live with total trust in His authority.**

There's so much here. To follow Jesus is to believe that He is the Master of every domain in our lives. I mentioned Luke 5, that parallel account where Jesus approaches these fishermen and He tells them where to drop their nets for fish. And from the beginning they realize that Jesus is sovereign over the fish of the sea. He's sovereign over everything, every domain. And the reason I just want to point that out briefly here is to remind us that there is nothing in your life... Or even go to your profession—so you're a businessperson, a lawyer, a sales person, a teacher, stay-at-home mom—realize this, Jesus knows far more about your profession than you do. Far more about every facet of your life than you do. And we have this dangerous tendency to compartmentalize discipleship—Christianity, following Jesus—as a part of our life into the spiritual, religious realm and everything else is in the practical realm. No! He's the Master of every domain in our lives. What it means to follow Him is to follow Him as a businessperson knowing that Jesus is sovereign over every single detail that's waiting on your desk tomorrow morning.

He's Master of every domain in our lives and He is the Lord of every detail in our lives. So He's Lord over it all and we go to Him with it all. We don't relegate Him to a side thing and then get on with our lives. No, He's over everything. He's Lord over politics and policies. He's Lord over budgets and bank accounts. He's Lord over our houses and our cars. He's Lord over our words and our thoughts, our every decision, our attitude, our actions. And to follow Him is to live with total trust in His sovereign supreme authority in every domain and over every detail of our lives. We follow Him in everything.

### **To live with urgent obedience to His mission.**

And then, finally, to follow Him is to live with urgent obedience to his mission. So He says, "*Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.*" He uses this imagery common to their vocation to communicate to them that this would be their mission. Every follower would be a fisher ... Every follower of Jesus is a fisher of men. That's the clear take away from Matthew 4:19. Instead of searching for fish all over a lake, they would be spreading the gospel all over the world. That's what He said to these disciples in their initial encounter here in Galilee in Matthew 4. First time they met in Galilee, "*Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.*" The last account we see with Jesus and these guys in the book of Matthew is Matthew 28:10, 16-20 where—if you remember—He tells them to go to Galilee and meet Him on a mountainside there in Galilee amongst the Gentiles. And He says to them, "Go and do *what?*" "Go and *make disciples of all nations.*" Every follower of Jesus is a fisher of men.

Every disciple is a disciple-maker. And this is an unconventional plan indeed with the good news of a kingdom to spread around the world. What did Jesus do? He gathered around Him a few guys for three years. And He loved them and He cared for them and He taught them and He trained them. When He left this earth, He had a handful of men who'd actually stuck around as His followers who were still adhering to Him. But every one of those people—men and women alike—who remained knew that they had one mission: make disciples of all the nations, fish for men. And the advancement of the gospel in the world would happen

through the Spirit of God filling every single one of those people to accomplish God's grand global purpose. This was an unconventional plan that demanded a universal response. This is an unconventional plan that demands a universal response.

Every follower a fisher. Every disciple a disciple-maker, without exception. Are you a follower of Jesus? Then your mission is to fish for men. Are you a disciple of Jesus? Then your mission is to make disciples. You guys know this is one of the deepest burdens of my heart for this church. That every disciple in this room would see themselves as a disciple-maker, that there would be no spectators. Because from the beginning ... From the beginning this is the picture we have. Every follower a fisher. Every disciple a disciple-maker. So if we're not fishing for men—leading men and women to Christ, if we're not making disciples—than Biblically haven't we missed the point of what it means to be disciples in the first place?

And so that's why we encourage every member of this body to be involved in a small group. If you're not in a small group there on the back of your worship guide there are all kinds of opportunities to connect with one. If you can't find one there, let us know. We want to help you find one. But even being in a small group is still not the end goal. Because just being in a small group, that doesn't guarantee anything. The goal is to be in a small group that's coming together and saying, "How can together we make disciples? How can we refuse to just coast and kind of sit in the class or spend time together? How can we grow together as we expand the kingdom, spread the good news of the kingdom all throughout Birmingham or to the ends of the earth together?" This is what we're supposed to be doing.

If our small group looks the same now as it did a year ago, then are we really fishing for men and women? Are we making disciples? It's why we encourage, "Okay let's do this. Let's figure out how this looks in each one of our lives." There's no way to really systematize, "Okay how is this going to happen?" But it is intended to be central in every one of our lives and our life as a community of faith. He has saved us. He's called us. He's chosen us to lead men and women, boys and girls to know the good news of the kingdom. Here in Birmingham or all over the world. And you say, "Well I can't do that. Fishing for men, leading people to Christ, I can't do that!" And if you think that, I would say, "Yes, that's the point! You can't do it, that's the point." So Jesus makes us what we cannot be in and of ourselves. This is the core of discipleship. We follow Him and He makes us fishers of men. And as a result of His grace—as we lean into Him, as we press into Him and adhere to Him—He makes every follower a fisher of men, every disciple a disciple-maker. So to follow Jesus is to live with urgent obedience to His mission.

## **Will you follow Jesus?**

All of this leads us to this one central question prompted by this text. Will you follow Jesus? And as you consider that question hovering over your seat, I think it's important to consider the cost of discipleship.

### **Consider the cost of discipleship.**

To consider the cost of what it means to follow Jesus. To live with radical abandonment for His glory. To lay down, leave behind all things in order to live for one thing. To do this with joyful dependence on His grace, faithful adherence to His person, supreme, total trust in His authority and to live with urgent obedience to His mission. This is costly.

### **Consider the cost of non-discipleship.**

But as you consider the cost of discipleship, I beg you to consider the cost of non-discipleship. In other words, what if you choose to reject Jesus? To live for yourself and to die in your sin? Let me assure you based on the authority of God's Word that the cost of non-discipleship is far greater than the cost of discipleship. Or even if you and I choose to sit back and waste away our lives in a casual, comfortable version of Christianity—casual listeners, convinced listeners—who refuse to take the step of becoming committed learners and followers of the King. Consider the cost for your life, for our lives, when we settle for casual association with Jesus. And we miss out on the abundance, and the joy, and the peace, and the satisfaction, and the power that Jesus has promised to all who will leave behind, let go of all things and cling to Him. The life that is fully engulfed in the supremacy ... Supreme satisfaction of Christ, we miss out for our lives. Instead choosing to coast through a monotonous, hollow version of Christianity that misses the whole point of what it means to follow the Jesus of the Bible. Don't do it!

For our lives, for our community. Consider the cost for the people around you, the people you work with, the people that we live among, the people in Birmingham who get a picture of half-hearted, lukewarm Christianity and a puny, pathetic Christ. Let's show people in Birmingham that Jesus is worthy of more than Sunday morning or even small group attendance. He is worthy of our lives and our possessions and our ... Let's show them that He's better than houses and cars and all the dreams and ambitions and aspirations of this world. He's worthy of it all and we gladly lay it all down for Him. We don't say, "Oh yes, I'm following Jesus. This is horrible. I've got to let go of all these things." We say, "He's so much better." We say to our neighbors, "Something better than more stuff. There's something better than worldly success."

Jesus is better. Let's show them He's better. Let's lead people to hear and see the good news of the King Who's worth losing everything for. And then for the world. How is it that billions of people have still not heard the gospel? Surely it is at least in part because we have been content with "business as usual" in the church instead of realizing what it means to really follow the Jesus of the Bible, to spend our lives spreading the gospel to the kingdom...to the ends of the earth. The consequences in the world are tragic when we in church do not follow Jesus as Scripture shows us.

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