

The man who calls people to follow Jonah 1:1-3; 3:1-10 (Page 916,917); Mark 1:14-20 (Page 990)

ONE SUNDAY MORNING, as the Bubba Rathbone family were driving home from First Assembly after a great service where their Pastor really preached a great message, 9 year old Sam said to his father Bubba, "When I grow up, dad, I've decided to be a Preacher."

"Well Sam," said Bubba, "I have no problem with that. But tell me, why have you now decided to be a Pastor? You were going to be a football player last week."

"I know I was," replied Sam, "but during the church service I realized that I'm going to be going to church every Sunday for the rest of my life - and that's a long time. So I decided that it would be funner to be standing and shouting than just sitting and listening!"

That is interesting way to be called by Jesus.

Today we enter Lent and we follow the steps of Jesus to Calvary according to Mark. Mark is the first gospel written around 50AD seeking to record the message of Jesus before it was lost due to the persecution of Nero.

Mark sets the scene. Jesus' ministry beings after John was arrested and put into prison. The Greek word for "arrested" is *paradidomi* -- the word that is used for Jesus' "betrayal" or "handing over" (3:19; 9:31; 10:32; 14:10, 11, 18, 21, 41, 44; 15:1, 10, 15). John is Jesus' precursor in terms of message of "repentance;" in terms of "being handed over;" and in terms of death. It may also be that John and Jesus are both precursors to the fate of the disciples who will face "being handed over" (13:9, 11). We know that all the disciples except John met an untimely gruesome death.

James R Edwards (*The Gospel according to Mark*) comments:

The arrest of John and the beginning of Jesus' ministry are intentionally correlated to show that the gospel is proclaimed and known in adversity and suffering, not in ease and comfort. Jesus' announcement of "good news" (1:14) in the immediate context of the arrest and eventual execution of righteous John epitomizes Mark's presentation of the gospel. [pp. 44-45]

JESUS NOW ENTERS the scene and starts his ministry. While Luke has his own unique take about Jesus beginning in Nazareth, his home town, where he stood up preached his first sermon and then was kicked out of town, Mark begins Jesus' ministry in the region of Galilee around the lake.

His message is clear. *The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.*

The primary location for this message was the local synagogues that was in every town. In the region of Galilee were many towns including Nazareth, Nain, Megiddo, Cana. On the shore of the lake we have Bethsaida in the north at the top of the lake, Capernaum then, Magdala, Tiberias, and Sennabrin in the south.

It was quite a large area to walk around and to preach in the local synagogues and to people in the country side. But the main message was that It is God's time and His kingdom is near. Turn from your old life and believe the good news that I am sharing.

Thus, this new preacher and his message had many hits on the local social media. He became the talk of the town as He walked and talked and spread his message.

FINALLY, HE COMES TO CAPERNAUM, a major fishing village designed according to that period's urban design of straight lines, which was built in parallel to the main Roman imperial highway, that crossed the village on the northern side. Capernaum grew larger at the time of Jesus (early Roman period, 1st C AD), and a synagogue was built in the centre of the village. It was quite a prosperous city and had about 1500 people living there.

It was the hometown of Peter and Andrew, James and John, and Matthew. The major challenge for Jesus was to find a group of men in whom he could teach the message of the Kingdom in word and power and would be relied upon to carry on after his death. It would seem that Jesus had read the ending of his story before it began and had embraced the God given call upon His life.

Now he needed men who were willing to follow that same call upon their life.

As we look at the brief account of the call of the disciples, there are a number of things that stand out about Jesus' calling these men.

FIRSTLY JESUS SAW THEM. This was not just about eyesight for the word see in the past tense means to know be aware, recognise.

A MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN has a heart attack and is taken to the hospital. While on the operating table she has a near death experience. During that experience she sees God and asks if this is it. God says no and explains that she has another 30 years to live.

Upon her recovery she decides to just stay in the hospital and have a face lift, liposuction, breast augmentation, tummy tuck, etc. She even has someone come in and change her hair colour. She figures since she's got another 30 years she might as well make the most of it.

She walks out of the hospital after the last operation and is killed by an ambulance speeding by. She arrives in front of God and complains, "I thought you said I had another 30 years."

God replies, "I didn't recognize you."

THE CALL OF JESUS is about recognition: Jesus recognizing you and you recognizing Jesus and acting in some way on that recognition.

Jesus saw them. But he did not just see them but He sought them out! He saw them as men who would fit the bill. They may not be highly educated because they were fisherman but they did have a successful fishing business. But more than that, he saw their potential. Sure they were a little rough around the edges but they were men of integrity and they would not run away

when the going got tough.

He also sought them out. He knew that they were fisherman and highly likely to be by the Sea of Galilee either fishing or sorting out the nets. He knew who he had in mind and deliberately sought them out.

IN MANY ACCOUNTS WE SEE people seeking Jesus to get something from Him. But in a few accounts, it is Jesus who goes out of his way to seek people out. One such account was the deliberate crossing of the Sea of Galilee to the other side where the Gadarene man filled with demons was living and struggling with his life. Jesus meets him in the early hours of the morning, sets him free and then climbs back into the boat to go back to the other side.

Jesus not only sees you but he seeks you out to call you to himself and to help you deal with what is troubling you.

BUT THEY ALSO SAW JESUS. They recognised Him. The chances they had heard a little bit about Him as the up and coming preacher. But there was something more. Something that was intangible. Maybe it was the way he talked or the way he walked or the way he was confident in who he was and what he was to do.

THE CALL OF JESUS FOR YOU and me is about recognition: Jesus seeing you and you seeing Jesus. He sees you and calls you to himself. He sees your potential and what you can be and do for God's Kingdom purposes. He sees our heart and likes what he sees.

He encourages us to see Him, know Him and see ourselves as he sees us. For all of us it is a bit of a shock because we find it hard to see ourselves as God sees us. Maybe it is our false modesty or low opinion of ourselves and our potential that gets in the way. Maybe it is our pride and determination to go it alone.

Whatever it is, it needs to go so that we see Jesus when He comes to us and embrace what He says to us.

Jesus sees you and me and sees our potential to make a Kingdom difference. But we must see Jesus and see ourselves as Jesus sees us.

SECONDLY JESUS CALLS US TO FOLLOW.

LITERALLY, JESUS DOES NOT ask them "to follow" him; but "Come behind me." The word for behind (*opiso*) can be a spatial term, to stand or walk **behind** someone. It can be a temporal term, to come at a time **after** something else. This might be the meaning behind John's use, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming

after

me" (1:7). It can also be a status term,

behind

(or

under

?) in terms of rank or importance. Jesus' rebuke of Peter, "Get

behind

me Satan" (8:33), is probably concerned with Peter trying to assume too much importance -- trying to be ahead of Jesus.

The command, "Come behind me," may be a way of saying, "Make Jesus the most important thing in your life." Even one's own self comes in second behind Jesus.

This understanding of the phrase may be supported by their reaction. We are told that Andrew and Peter, "immediately leaving the nets, they followed him." Their successful occupations take a back seat to Jesus. James and John "leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired hands, they go behind him." Their family relationships take a back seat to Jesus.

This is the most challenging part of the call of Jesus: the giving up of what is most important to you. For each of us, it will be something different but it will be something that will cost us dearly in some way or another.

JESUS WOULD LATER say *If anyone wants to be my disciple, they will have to deny self, take up one's cross and follow me.*

THE CALL OF JESUS IS TO FOLLOW: to put Jesus first in your life every moment of everyday. It is laying aside what we want and delighting in what He wants. It is giving up something or someone precious in our eyes for something that is better.

It is a willingness to sell all to buy the pearl of great price.

It is a call to be a lifelong follower and play follow the leader with Jesus always leading. It is not about what we want but about what He wants. It is about sacrifice and suffering and serving with Jesus showing us the way and we being prepared to walk that way behind Him.

That is why many are called but few make it because it became too hard to follow.

Like in the days of Jesus, Jesus comes and finds us. Check me out and make up your own mind. Then he says "Follow me" Let me lead you. Let me come along side you.

MANY PEOPLE DO NOT WANT TO BE FOLLOWERS. They want to lead, make their own decisions and be in control.

S. I. McMillen, in his book *None of These Diseases*, tells a story of a young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application blank that asked, "Are you a leader?" Being both honest and conscientious, she wrote, "No," and returned the application, expecting the worst. To her surprise, she received this letter from the college:

"Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower."

THIRDLY JESUS PROMISES US TO BECOME FISHERS OF PEOPLE.

Finally Jesus invited them on an adventure; a fishing adventure that would change their lives and the lives of people

Coming with Jesus meant work. (Being a disciple is more than just going to heaven when I die in the sweet by and by.) They were to "fish for people".

They were going to be taught by the greatest fisherman that ever existed. Jesus would teach them all that they need to know to catch people.

THEY WOULD GET ON THE JOB TRAINING and it would start the very next Sabbath when Jesus was confronted by a demon in the local church and then afterwards to Peter's place for lunch only to find that it was not ready because Peter's mum had a fever and was not feeling too well. Then Mark reports

³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed.³³ The whole town gathered at the door,

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and Jesus healed many who had various diseases.³⁵ He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS, Jesus taught them about the Kingdom in parables and though they were a bit thick, Jesus continued to persevere and teach them.

They were taught to preach the good news of the Kingdom and do Kingdom work viz heal the sick and cast out demons.

When Jesus sent them out two by two to preach, teach and heal, they came back saying that even the demons obeyed them.

THEY WERE A COUPLE OF TIMES when they tried to cast out a demon while Jesus, Peter, James and John were up the mount of transfiguration but it was soon sorted out by Jesus and they learnt a valuable lesson.

THESE DISCIPLES embraced this Kingdom work as their lifelong work. Being led by the Holy Spirit it started when Peter preached and many became followers of Jesus. His first attempt at preaching produced nearly 3000 followers. Much more in one go than Jesus ever did.

I would have imagined at that time, Jesus talking to God and saying *That's my boy! I taught him!*

BUT COULD JESUS SAY the same about us. Jesus promised the disciples and us that He would make us into fishers of people. He just needs some followers to put up their hands and not be afraid.

EVERY SUNDAY LIZ AND I pray for people to get better. It does not have to be us need should it be. It is not a practice that only Liz and I can do. You are most welcome to get some on the job training so that when called upon to pray for your family member or friend during the week you will know what to do.

I am happy to run again a training day to teach people to pray for the sick and to cast out demons etc.

FINALLY, THE CALL OF JESUS IS URGENT. *The time has come. The Kingdom of God is near.*

It needs an urgent response by us. The disciples immediately left their nets and followed him.

ON BOARD THE SHIP THAT NIGHT was John Harper and his much-beloved six-year-old daughter Nana. According to documented reports, as soon as it was apparent that the ship was going to sink, John Harper immediately took his daughter to a lifeboat. It is reasonable to assume that this widowed preacher could have easily gotten on board this boat to safety; however, it never seems to have crossed his mind. He bent down and kissed his precious little girl; looking into her eyes he told her that she would see him again someday. The flares going off in the dark sky above reflected the tears on his face as he turned and headed towards the crowd of desperate humanity on the sinking ocean liner. As the rear of the huge ship began to lurch upwards, it was reported that Harper was seen making his way up the deck yelling "Women, children and unsaved into the lifeboats!" It was only minutes later that the Titanic began to rumble deep within. Most people thought it was an explosion; actually, the gargantuan ship was literally breaking in half. At this point, many people jumped off the decks and into the icy, dark waters below. John Harper was one of these people.

That night 1528 people went into the frigid waters. John Harper was seen swimming frantically to people in the water leading them to Jesus before the hypothermia became fatal. Mr. Harper swam up to one young man who had climbed up on a piece of debris. Rev. Harper asked him between breaths, "Are you saved?" The young man replied that he was not.

Harper then tried to lead him to Christ only to have the young man who was near shock, reply no. John Harper then took off his life jacket and threw it to the man and said "Here then, you need this more than I do..." and swam away to other people. A few minutes later Harper swam back to the young man and succeeded in leading him to salvation. Of the 1528 people that went into the water that night, six were rescued by the lifeboats. One of them was this young man on the debris. Four years later, at a survivors meeting, this young man stood up and in tears recounted how John Harper had led him to Christ. Mr. Harper had tried to swim back to help other people, yet because of the intense cold, had grown too weak to swim. His last words before going under in the frigid waters were "Believe on the Name of the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." Does Hollywood remember this man? No. Oh well, no matter. This servant of God did what he had to do. While other people were trying to buy their way onto the lifeboats and selfishly trying to save their own lives, John Harper gave up his life so that others could be saved.

John Harper knew what it meant to live life with urgency.