

Main Idea: In Mark 1:14-20 we come face to face with the call to go fishing for men. In this passage we learn two important insights about fishing for men.

I. Fishing for men is what Jesus did (14-15).

- A. Jesus talked about hope.
- B. Jesus talked about the kingdom of God.
 - 1. There is a King.
 - 2. There is a rival.
 - 3. The King is reclaiming what belongs to Him.
- C. Jesus called for a response.
 - 1. The gospel requires repentance.
 - 2. The gospel requires faith.

II. Fishing for men is what Jesus enlists His followers to do (16-20).

- A. Jesus chose Simon and Andrew (16-18).
 - 1. To be a disciple you must be willing to give up control.
 - 2. To be a disciple you must be willing to follow Jesus.
 - 3. To be a disciple you must be willing to fish for men.
- B. Jesus chose James and John (19-20).
 - 1. To follow Jesus you must believe His message.
 - 2. To follow Jesus you must know Him as a person.

Take Inventory: In light of Jesus' call, ask yourself these questions...

- 1. Are you sure you have come to the Fisher of men?
- 2. Are you involved in fishing for men?
- 3. Do your nets need mending?
- 4. Where does the Fisher of men want you to throw your nets this year?

Last Sunday evening as I delivered this year's *State of the Church Address*, I finished by laying before the congregation two challenges for 2009. First, I urged you to look for ways to **get more lines in the water** this year (to be biblically accurate, I probably should have said more *nets* in the water). But the point is, the Lord never intended for lost people to come to us. We're supposed to go to them. By His design, we're to gather for worship and edification, but we're to scatter to do evangelism. We're supposed to be fishers of men.

Secondly, I urged each of you to **make hospitality a greater reality** at WBC in the months before us. I suggested that unless we're sick, I don't believe the Lord intends for our homes to be castles in which we hide out in seclusion. Rather, our homes are actually wonderful, God-given tools for ministry, and that although some people have the gift of hospitality, His Word commands *all of us* to demonstrate hospitality.

Outreach and hospitality. Those are the targets towards which we need to point our collective arrows this year. "But why?" you ask. Why should I adjust my schedule and checkbook this year to give increased attention to fishing for men and showing hospitality towards the people God has placed in my life (including strangers, by the way, for hospitality means "love of *strangers*")? And not just *why*, but *how*? How can we do a better job when it comes to evangelism and home-based ministry? Thankfully, God's Word addresses both questions for us, and for the next few Sundays we're going to devote several messages to look for those answers. We'll start with fishing this week and next. Then we'll explore hospitality for a couple of weeks.

Did you realize that fishing for men is not an option if you call yourself a Christian? Not according to Jesus. In Mark 1:14-20 we come face to face with Jesus' call to go fishing for men. Specifically, as we work our way through this passage we're going to learn two important insights regarding fishing for men.

I. Fishing for men is what Jesus did (14-15).

Notice verses 14-15, "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'"

What's Jesus doing? He's fishing for men. Before examining His fishing ministry, notice the setting of it. Mark says, "After John was put in prison." He's talking about the John he mentioned back in verse 4, the John who came to prepare the world for the Messiah's arrival. And how did John do it? By "baptizing in the desert region and preaching

a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Was John the Baptist’s preaching successful? It depends what you mean by “successful.” Mark says he ended up in prison for it.

To the multitudes in Israel John’s imprisonment must have seemed a real tragedy. At the peak of his popularity, when his ministry was really starting to make a difference and God was using him to turn countless numbers from their lives of sin, King Herod arrested John and stuck him in prison. In fact, as the result of a cruel scheme instigated by Herod’s unlawful wife, Herodias, John was beheaded. The whole thing was a great misfortune, a waste of potential. Or was it?

It was a loss, for sure, but certainly no waste. John fulfilled his God-given purpose. Though his years were brief he accomplished His God-given assignment and introduced the world to the Messiah. And so, according to Mark, after *that*, after John was put in prison, *Jesus* entered center stage.

There’s a vital truth illustrated here. In the words of J. D. Jones, “God’s work will never be allowed to come to a stand for a lack of workers! The Sanhedrin stoned Stephen, but after Stephen came Paul. John Hus was burned in Constance, and Savonarola was gibbeted in Florence, but after Hus and Savonarola came Martin Luther. Mary kindled fires for Protestant confessors: she burned Latimer, Ridley, Hooper, Cranmer, in the hope of burning out Protestantism with them; but God raised one after another to continue their witness... It is ever so; God buries His workmen, but carries on His work. After John comes Jesus.”^[2]

This truth would have encouraged Mark’s readers in the first century. Many Christians were going to prison for the message they preached. Mark offers this helpful reminder, “You are not the first and you won’t be the last.”

The brevity of the statement strikes me, “After John was put in prison.” That’s it? Why didn’t Mark tell us more about John? After all, there was certainly more to tell. But it wasn’t necessary, for in the end John the Baptist was just a *servant*, just like we are.

With that background, with John out of the limelight, the real story begins. After John was put in prison, *Jesus* took center stage. What did He do? Mark says He moved north into Galilee. Why? For starters, for safety reasons. He’d been down south in Judea prior to this, where John was when arrested.

By the way, though this is where Mark begins the record of Jesus’ public ministry, this isn’t where Jesus began His public ministry. Between verses 13 and 14 there’s a gap of nearly one year, sometimes referred to as “the year of obscurity” in Jesus’ life. Neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke tell us much about this year, but the fourth gospel writer does. Plug in John 1-4 at this point. Following Jesus’ baptism, He spent a year ministering in both Galilee and Judea, during which time he turned water into wine at Cana, turned tables over in the temple in Jerusalem, and taught Nicodemus. On one trip from Judea to Galilee, perhaps the very trip Mark has in mind here, Jesus went through Samaria and gave living water to the woman at the well.

What did Jesus do once in Galilee? Mark says He went fishing for men. How? By preaching. The Lord engaged in a verbal ministry of proclamation. And what He said was radical, for He talked about three attention-grabbing subjects.

A. Jesus talked about hope. Mark says that Jesus proclaimed *the good news* of God (KJV “the gospel”). Far too often preachers are known for what they are *against*. Their pulpit ministries are negative. Though He stepped on toes Jesus preached a positive message. He announced *the good news of God*. The preposition “of” indicates that God is both the source and object of this good news. The message Jesus preached was both *from* God and *about* God. The gospel is indeed the best news the world has ever heard for it originated with God and is about what God has done so that sinners might experience forgiveness and new life.

Notice the first subject Jesus addressed in His hope-giving proclamation of God’s good news. “The time has come!” He said. “The time is fulfilled,” as the AV puts it. What “time” did He have in mind? The time the prophets foretold for centuries, the time when God would break into human history and fix the problem that began at the beginning of time, the problem of sin, that’s the time.

You see, on the very day in the garden when the first couple committed treason in God’s world, God announced the time was coming (Gen 3:15). And as century after century passed, God in His mercy postponed final judgment, sustaining rebellious mankind in His world, all the while preparing the world for His chosen One, the Deliverer who would come to rescue sinners and judge the wicked. “The time has come,” Jesus said. Man had had his hour, now God was about to have *His* hour.

Galatians 4:4-5 “But *when the time had fully come*, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”

Romans 5:6 “You see, *at just the right time*, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.”^[3]

Are you looking for hope today, my friend? Then look to the Sovereign One who, when He came fishing, talked about hope.

B. Jesus talked about the kingdom of God. “The kingdom of God is near [‘at hand,’ AV],” He said. In a sense, this statement answers the question of what *the time* is. “The time has come,” Jesus said, “the time for the kingdom of God to come.”

These again are radical words. To speak of kingdom at a time when the Romans ruled and acknowledged only one kingdom, theirs, that’s radical and that could get you killed. But Jesus talked a lot about the kingdom of God.

You say, “Just what is the kingdom of God?” To understand Jesus’ words we need to understand three basic truths.

1. *There is a King.* If there is a kingdom there must be a king. There is a King in God’s kingdom. It is His Son. God has committed all authority to His Son (Matt 28:18). The Son created the universe, indeed created it for the purpose of bringing glory to Himself (Col 1:15-16). So there is one true king. However...

2. *There is a rival.* This rival, Satan, tried to usurp the throne of God (Isa 14:12-14), but failed and was cast out of God’s presence. Next he tried to get others to join him in his rebellion, “Did God really say?” he asked the woman in Genesis 3. And you know the result. The King pronounced a curse on His world.

3. *The King is reclaiming what belongs to Him.* That’s why He robed Himself in human flesh and came *inognito* to Bethlehem. The King came to reclaim His world.

A skeptic will say, “It doesn’t look like He succeeded. The world’s still a mess.” But He’s not done. He came the first time to rescue sinners—that’s why He died on the cross. He’s coming a second time to eliminate rebellion forever.

You say, “Is God’s kingdom a present reality or a future hope?” It’s both. The King is ruling right now. Where? In the lives of His people. But the day is coming when the King will return and establish His reign over the world.

Sometimes Jesus spoke of the kingdom as a present reality, such as here (“The kingdom of God is near”) and in Matthew 12:28 (“But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you”). At other times Jesus spoke of the kingdom as a future hope (Matthew 8:11 “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven”).

To put it another way, the question isn’t whether the King reigns. The question is *where*. Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come...on earth as it is in heaven.” The King is ruling right now. Where? In heaven. Where else? In the lives of His people. And at a soon coming day He will extend His reign over the whole earth, indeed, He exhorted us to pray for that day.

My friend, I’ll say it as plainly as I can. If you become a Christian you are taking a radical step. You are changing kingdoms, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. You’re changing allegiances, from sin to righteousness. That brings us to the third primary subject in Jesus’ radical message. Hope. Kingdom.

C. Jesus called for a response. “Repent and believe the good news,” He said. The gospel is good news, yes, but it’s not status quo news. Jesus didn’t preach a feel-good-about-yourself message, but a life-transforming message. He talked a lot about personal *change*. He made it clear that the gospel requires two things.

1. *The gospel requires repentance.* If there is a King who is reclaiming His world, what must sinners do who desire to be right with Him? “Repent,” Jesus said. To repent means more than to feel sorry for your sin. To repent is to renounce your sin, to repudiate it, and to get rid of it, by the grace of God.

“Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor,”—for a man who once loved money, as did Zachaeus, that’s repentance. “The things I once counted gain I now count but loss for Christ,”—that too is repenting. “Burn them,” said a convert in the Welsh Revival, handing to his minister three gambling-clubs’ membership tickets—that is repenting.^[4]

Please realize that a person cannot enter God’s kingdom without repenting. That doesn’t mean a person must change his life in order to be saved. It does mean he must be willing to be changed for that’s exactly what King Jesus will do when He enters.

But even repenting isn’t enough, for it’s not sufficient to turn from sin. A person must turn *to* something, to the right something.

2. *The gospel requires faith.* “Repent and believe,” Jesus said. That indicates that faith is lacking apart from accompanying repentance. It also indicates that repentance is incomplete without faith. “Believe the good news!” Jesus said. The good news is that God has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves, at the cross. Believe it!

This is a radical message, isn’t it? Quite frankly, it’s one not preached in far too many churches. Yet listen to Jesus. He called for people to turn from sin and turn to Him in faith. If a person doesn’t turn *from* his sin, it indicates he hasn’t really turned *to* Christ. When a person truly turns to Christ, there will be a change, a lasting, obvious change in the person. The person didn’t do it. Christ did it. When a person turns from his sin to Christ, the Savior changes that person. He cancels the penalty of sin immediately and then begins to break the power of sin that previously

enslaved him.

So what do we learn about fishing for men? First, it's what Jesus did.

II. Fishing for men is what Jesus enlists His followers to do (16-20).

We find two such examples in verses 16-20. First...

A. Jesus chose Simon and Andrew (16-18). Verses 16-17—"As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.'"

It's worth noting that Jesus *walked*. There were no cars or planes for Him. He walked literally hundreds and hundreds of miles during His three year ministry as an itinerant preacher.

And here we see His methodology. He selected and then worked through disciples. Don't miss that He chose His men. They didn't choose Him, not initially. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit (John 15:16)."

He also went to where His people were. He didn't stay in the ivory tower. He went fishing for men. In this case He went to the job-site of two brothers, Simon [later to be renamed Peter] and Andrew. He *saw* these two men—don't miss His sovereign gaze here, for He is still seeing and seeking His disciples. And then He *spoke* to them powerful words, words that teach us just how radical the response is to be His disciple. If you want to be Jesus' disciple you must take the following three steps.

1. *To be a disciple you must be willing to give up control.* "Come," He told them. Remember, these men were fishermen. They didn't fish for recreation but as an occupation. *Come.* With that word Jesus asked them to sign on the dotted line. Are you with me or not? Are you willing to let go of everything you've considered important in your life until now, or not?

You say, "Do I have to get rid of everything to be Jesus' disciple?" No, unless He says so. But you must be willing. He called these two men to leave their jobs. He may ask you to do the same, or He may ask you to stay where you are and represent Him there. But in either case, things will be different, for you have given up the controls.

2. *To be a disciple you must be willing to follow Jesus.* "Come, follow Me," He said. Sometimes we complicate things too much. We view discipleship as a ten week course. Jesus made it simple, though not easy, and highly personal. *Follow Me.* To follow you must yield, submit, and resolve to obey Him.

Have you ever been in a car caravan, one in heavy traffic where you are *not* in the lead? "Why is he going *that* way! Where is he taking us now!" It's not easy to follow someone else, especially if the way he chooses doesn't make sense to us. If you want to be Jesus' disciple, you must be willing to follow Him. Wherever He leads.

I need to put Simon and Andrew's decision into perspective. Though this is their first mention in Mark's Gospel, this wasn't the first time they met Jesus. You'll find that encounter in John 1, where, months before the call we're considering, John the Baptist pointed Andrew to Jesus, saying, "Look! the Lamb of God!" Andrew then found Simon and brought him to Jesus. In the months that followed they heard Jesus' teaching and saw His miracles. Now it's decision time, for it's one thing to be fascinated with Jesus, even to agree with Him and applaud Him. Yet it's another to *follow Him*. And that's what He requires of His disciples.

3. *To be a disciple you must be willing to fish for men.* "Follow Me...and I will make you fishers of men." Remember, these men were fishermen. But what did Jesus do? He took their abilities, transformed them, and used them for kingdom purposes. In Luke's parallel account we hear Jesus saying, "From now on you will *catch men* (Luke 5:10)."

What has the Lord given you? The ability to sing? Then sing for Him. Hands that can fix things? Then fix things for His kingdom. Were you a fighter? Now be a soldier for Him! To follow Him means that you lay at His feet all that you are and have and say, "I am yours. Use me."

You say, "I don't have what it takes to fish for men." Be encouraged. Take another look at the verb "make." Jesus said, "Come, follow Me, and *I will make you* fishers of men." What Jesus calls us to do He enables us to do. It's a process, and it begins the day we surrender our all to Him and start fishing for men.

To fish for fish is to do what you've always done. To fish for men is to get on board with the Master's plan to reach lost people. To fish for fish is to do what meets temporal needs. To fish for men is to engage in a task that will produce eternal results.

How did Simon and Andrew respond? Verse 18 tells us, "At once they *left* their nets and *followed* him." Left nets. Followed him. The problem for many folks is that they try to keep their nets, to add Jesus to their already cluttered lives. That's a sure way to live a frustrated life, to live with two masters. Not these two brothers. They left it all and followed Jesus.

In fact, Peter later acknowledged to Jesus in Matthew 19:27, “We have left everything to follow you!” Can you say that? Can I? Have we truly turned over the controls of our lives to Jesus and surrendered everything to Him? Please realize that Jesus later told a group of would-be disciples in Luke 14:26, “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.”

Mark includes a second example in verses 19-20...

B. Jesus chose James and John (19-20). “When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.”

This situation is even more shocking in some ways. The first set of brothers left their nets. The latter pair left their dad sitting in the boat!

I’m sure they loved their father. The point is, they loved Jesus more.

Let that sink in. These sons of Zebedee put Jesus above their father, above the family business, above the security of staying in the comfort zone of the familiar, above *everything*.

Why would a person give up everything to follow Jesus? To take such drastic steps—and these are drastic steps—you must have some solid reasons. Granted, only the Spirit of God can enable a person to respond to Jesus’ sovereign call, but from a human perspective, two things are necessary.

1. *To follow Jesus you must believe His message.* Is what Jesus said true or is it not? Is He the King, the Son of the Living God, or is He not? Is He the way, the truth, and the life, or is He not? Is He going to establish His kingdom, reward His people and judge the unbelieving, or is He not? In order to follow Him, you must *believe His message*. You must confess, “Yes! I believe what You say!” What’s more...

2. *To follow Jesus you must know Him as a person.* He who is the King of the universe must be *your King*. You must receive Him personally. You must know *Him*.

Quite frankly, if you don’t believe He is worthy, then don’t follow Him. It’s not that your assessment is right, for He is worthy. But until you believe He is worthy, you will not follow Him. Oh, you may pay Him lip-service, but that will last only until tribulation comes or the cares of this world recapture your heart.

What is it the redeemed multitudes in heaven are crying? Hear them in the book of Revelation: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!” Why have they followed him to loss of family and reputation, to ridicule and hardship, even to burning stakes? “He is *worthy!*” is their cry.

Following Jesus took James to prison and death by sword (Acts 12:2). For John it was exile on Patmos. For Peter it was crucifixion in Rome. And according to tradition, Andrew was crucified near Athens. In fact, one tradition says that Andrew was crucified for the crime of leading the wife of a Roman governor to Christ, whose conversion so infuriated the governor that he had Andrew crucified. Talk about paying a price for being a fisher of men!

But for these four men there was no regret. They followed Christ, even unto death, because they counted the cost and considered Him *worthy*.

And why not? Who else can offer peace and joy that never fades? Who else guarantees life beyond the grave? There is but One who can, the One who is worthy, *Jesus the Messiah*. And He calls you today, “Repent and believe the good news. Come, follow Me, and become a fisher of men.”

To leave all and follow Jesus is no sacrifice. It’s not. It makes perfect sense to trade in the pleasures of sin that last for a short season to gain eternal treasure. Jim Elliot, himself a martyr, was right when he said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

It’s sad yet true. Many do not know the truth about Jesus, and that’s why they don’t follow Him as they ought. How else can we explain why the American church is full of people who think that sitting in church an hour a week is sufficient, who aren’t involved in fishing for men, who in fact have known sin in their lives yet tolerate it, and who still claim to be followers of Jesus?

Beloved, the One who gave His all for us is worthy of our all. That being the case, let’s take inventory...

Take Inventory: In light of Jesus’ call, ask yourself these questions...

1. *Are you sure you have come to the Fisher of men?* In other words, do you really know Christ? The Son of God came to earth to rescue men and women, boys and girls, from the practice and consequences of self-focused living. He went to the cross to pay sin’s penalty. He rose again to give new and eternal life to those who would repent and believe in Him. Do you really know the One who came fishing for men?

2. *Are you involved in fishing for men?* Are you seeking to share Christ with the people around you who don’t know the good news about Him? Think about your neighbors. Have you shared the gospel with them? Are you

praying fervently for their salvation? What about the people you go to school with, or work with, or work out with at the Life Center? Are you involved in *fishing for men*?

3. *Do your nets need mending?* What would happen if, this afternoon, you did talk to your neighbor about his need for a Savior? Might he say to you, “You say I need Jesus. What about *you*?” “What about me?” you respond. To which he would state, “I see the way you treat your wife and kids, and quite frankly, I’m as good a husband and father as you are. And I hear the words that come out of your mouth when you think no one is listening. Doesn’t seem like this Jesus is making much of a difference in your life, so why tell me I need Him?”

It’s hard to catch fish if the net has holes in it. Are their sin issues in your life that need attention? Do you need to ask your family members to forgive you for the way you’ve been treating them? Do you need to ask your neighbor to forgive you for the way you’ve treated him? Or the fellow at work for the way you’ve taken advantage of him? If your net isn’t catching any fish, then make sure it doesn’t have holes in it. The unsaved people around us may be dead in their sins, but they can still smell our hypocrisy if it’s there.

4. *Where does the Fisher of men want you to throw your nets this year?* Ask Him. Ask Him to lay upon your heart people that He desires to use you to reach out to this month. Ask Him to make you a fisher of men. Ask Him to direct your steps each day so that you have opportunity to show Christ and share Christ with lost people.

Hymn: “*Let Your Heart Be Broken*” (#315)

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] This message is built upon a message preached at WBC on 5/23/04 in an expositional series through the Gospel of Mark.

[2] J. D. Jones, p. 21.

[3] **1 Timothy 2:5-6** “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given *in its proper time*.”

[4] J. D. Jones, p. 22.