

¹⁶ Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee,
he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea,
for they were fishermen.

¹⁷ And Jesus said to them,
"Follow me,
and I will make you become fishers of men."

¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹ And going on a little farther,
he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother,
who were in their boat mending the nets.

²⁰ And immediately he called them,
and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

Mark has set up this whole section of the beginning of Jesus' ministry first with the basic summary and meat of Jesus' proclamation in the previous verses. Jesus' words specifically called for action on the part of the hearers: The time is now! The kingdom of God is here! Repent and believe in the Gospel! The following then is going to give us the opportunity to see how people react to that message and what else it means for people.

As Jesus calls His first disciples, you have to be struck by the contrast between what you expect versus what you get. So far the setup to Jesus is huge, cosmic. The Gospel is life-changing proclamation about the King and His Kingdom. A messenger sent from God is preparing God's people for the Day of the LORD. God is preparing His people for a New Creation. Jesus has been baptized by John with the voice of His Father proclaiming Him His Son. The Holy Spirit has descended upon/in Him. He has faced off against Satan. And now? He walks along a sea in some backwater area and calls some fishermen to follow Him. How in the world is that life-changing, earth-shattering? Did Jesus somehow miss the memo? Or have we?

Sea of Galilee – Sometimes this body of water is referred to as a sea or a lake (see Luke 5:1) and could also be called Kinnereth (Num 34:11; Josh. 13:27), Gennesaret, or Tiberias (John 6:1). It's about 14 miles long and 6 miles wide.

Simon and Andrew – Brothers. Simon will also be called Peter, but Mark calls him Simon until Jesus calls him Peter (which means "rock," 3:16) and from then on calls him Peter until Jesus specifically calls him Simon (14:37). Though we don't learn this here, John 1:44 tells us that Simon and Andrew are from Bethsaida, which is a village on the north end of the lake. Simon is the first named disciple of Jesus here, though in other accounts he is not the first called disciple (in John's Gospel it's Andrew is called first and invites Peter to come to Jesus too (John 1:40-42). Nevertheless, once the main 12 disciples are gathered, Peter seems to play a prominent role (whether that's a reflection of his personality or something else, we don't really know) and is often the one who speaks (sometimes brilliantly, and

other times foolishly) on behalf of the other disciples (Mark 8:32-33; 9:5-6; 14:29-31, 66-72).

Casting a net – While it's not necessarily super significant, it's interesting to note that Simon and Andrew (compared to James and John) were fishing on the shore by casting a net with weights on it into the water, which would then trap fish in it. Not all fishermen fish with the same methods or in the same ways. Likewise, Jesus uses us from our different backgrounds and different skills to be part of the same basic mission, though we might work in different ways.

Follow me – Literally the words in Greek are “here, after/behind me.” The English translation is not wrong/bad, but the words of Jesus are a bit more forceful. The common understanding of Jesus' relationship to Simon, Peter and the rest is that Jesus is that Jesus is modelling a rabbi who is calling other people to be His students who follow after Him. The main issue with using this model is that Jesus' example does not fit it. Rabbis did not recruit disciples, the disciples were the ones who chose their rabbi and dedicated their lives to following him. In John's Gospel, Jesus even drives this point home by telling them they did not choose Him, rather He chose them (John 15:16). This isn't true just for these disciples though, it is true of all followers of Jesus. We emphasize God being the one who saves us, not we ourselves. The closest Biblical parallel of the phenomenon of a prophetic leader calling a follower is that of Elijah calling Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21), which certainly is in the proper frame of reference, since Elijah has already been called to mind by the ministry of John the Baptizer.

1 Ki. 19:19-21 ESV So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him.²⁰ And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?"²¹ And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.

Though in these words (“Come, follow me”) Jesus says nothing of repentance and faith, we know that that was His main message, and these words now are a direct, individualized call to respond. Indeed, Simon and Andrew will “repent” of their lives by turning from their dedication to fishing and devote their time and energy to following Jesus from now on.

Fishers of men – This is a playful use of language. If there is any doubt whether Jesus is merely a rabbi calling disciples, this exchange should clear that up. Jesus is not merely a teacher nor are they merely learners. Jesus takes their current vocation as fishermen and redirects it so that they will now be fishing after people. A similar idea is found in the Old

Testament, but the context is one of judgment. If you're caught in the net, it is for punishment that cannot be escaped.

Jer. 16:16 ESV ¶ "Behold, I am sending for many fishers, declares the LORD, and they shall catch them. And afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the clefts of the rocks.

Ezek. 29:4-5 ESV I will put hooks in your jaws, and make the fish of your streams stick to your scales; and I will draw you up out of the midst of your streams, with all the fish of your streams that stick to your scales.⁵ And I will cast you out into the wilderness, you and all the fish of your streams; you shall fall on the open field, and not be brought together or gathered. To the beasts of the earth and to the birds of the heavens I give you as food.

Amos 4:2 ESV The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness that, behold, the days are coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks.

Hab. 1:14-17 ESV You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler.¹⁵ He brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net; he gathers them in his dragnet; so he rejoices and is glad.¹⁶ Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich.¹⁷ Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?

In Jesus' example though, that image is flipped on its head. Jesus has come to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom, calling people to be part of it. Jesus' words imply a division of people. Some will be caught and others will be left behind. It will be more beneficial by far to be caught in the gracious net of God's kingdom (rescuing them *from* judgment rather than capturing them *for* judgment). Stated more precisely, Jesus has come to save people, not to destroy them (John 3:16-17). That is not to say that judgment will not come (e.g. Mark 11:12-17; 12:1-12; 13:14-23), but that was not His desire for the people. The other aspect that can easily be missed is that Jesus already is foreshadowing the disciples' role in Jesus' mission. Jesus alone will not accomplish His mission by Himself. He is enlisting and using His disciples to do the very thing for which He has come (which would be impossible for them to do if He had not first called them).

And immediately – "Immediately" will be strongly emphasized at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. One event flows dramatically and quickly into the next. Here it's insightful to think about the effect of this word. Jesus tells Simon and Andrew to literally drop everything and change their lifestyle from fishermen into fishers of men. And what is their response? "Well, Jesus, we need to think about this. Let me get back to you tomorrow." Nope. Their reaction is clear and prompt. Immediately they drop everything and follow Jesus. This really confuses us and doesn't make a lot of sense. Think about Jesus' resume so far. Yes, we

know about the voice from heaven, the Holy Spirit, the temptation by Satan, but what do these disciples know? In Mark's Gospel all they have is Jesus' own presence and His words (in John's Gospel, these disciples know much more, but Mark, doesn't want you to think about that background).

Jn. 1:35-42 ESV The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples,³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.³⁸ Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"³⁹ He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ).⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

Jesus' words are more than enough. Jesus' authority is strongly portrayed in the calling of the first disciples. Jesus is one who can call people to give up everything and follow Him, and people actually do exactly that. That kind of reaction would not make sense if anyone else called on people to do the same, but with Jesus, this is exactly the kind of reaction that is necessary. Mark's narrative constantly is driving his readers to ask for themselves who Jesus is and determine for themselves what is the proper response to Him. We have to begin wrestling with why these four men readily respond to the call of a total stranger and consider what their response means for us too.

And going on a little farther – The story is about to repeat itself with another set of brothers. This time, they are in a boat fishing rather than on shore, working in the family business, but Jesus' interactions with them are very much the same.

James the son of Zebedee and John his brother – A very similar story to what we just heard. This time, James and John are also mentioned with reference to their father and the servants in the boat. Both James and John were common first names in Jesus' day, so referring to James and John with reference to their father was a way to differentiate and identify them. Later on, we learn that like Simon, they also had another name by which they were called.

Mk. 3:16-19 ESV He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter);¹⁷ James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder);¹⁸ Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot,¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

This James will eventually be arrested and executed by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1-2, in A.D. 44). John will go on to be the last living of the Twelve, writing the Gospel, Epistles, and Revelation).

immediately he called them – In the Bible the language of “calling” is extremely potent. When God speaks, things happen. By His speaking, all things came into existence. His Word does exactly what it says it does. When God calls us by name, it is not merely to say, “Hi, how are you doing?” His words give life, and a life that only God can give.

Isa. 43:1 ESV But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

Rom. 1:6-7 ESV including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,⁷ To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rom. 8:28-30 ESV And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants – Whereas not much can be learned about Simon and Andrew, the details around James and John allow us to make a few more inferences. Unlike Simon and Andrew, they are in a boat, which is a big investment. Moreover, the mention of servants tells us that this is not just a one-person business, this could tell us that James and John are part of a fairly substantial fishing business. This makes their decision to drop their nets and follow Jesus all the more surprising. They had for themselves a secure and successful career path, but now they are giving it all up simply because Jesus called them.

followed him – Jesus’ calling involved both a major change or reorientation of life (repentance), trust in Jesus’ words and authority (faith), and a great deal of sacrifice on the part of those who did follow Him. We too are invited to the same kind of life as Jesus Himself foreshadows, that these disciples are to bring in more disciples into the Kingdom of God, which is the great (co-)mission of God (Matt. 28:19-20).