



## Sermon Transcript September 10, 2017

### An Invitation to Follow Matthew 4:18-22

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on September 10, 2017 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com).

**Sermon Text**  
**Matthew 4:18-22**

<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." <sup>20</sup> Immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

## Introduction

I want to offer you an invitation this morning and the invitation comes right out of our text this morning. Actually, it is an invitation that comes straight from the mouth of Jesus. It is an invitation to follow Jesus. Jesus offers the invitation this way in Matthew 4:19, *“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”*

It seems to me, over the past several years, there has been an increase in the number of people who use the title “Christ-follower” to describe their faith affiliation. When asked about the nature of their faith background, they simply respond by saying, “I am a Christ-follower.” I like that. It communicates something. I am not just affiliated with a religion, namely, Christianity. Nor am I just “a believer” in something or in someone. No doubt, I am a “believer” in Jesus Christ. As the church has confessed throughout the ages, “I believe Jesus is God the Son, the second person of the eternal Trinity, who at a specific point in history took to himself a human nature and was born as Jesus of Nazareth in order to accomplish our redemption.”<sup>1</sup> Yes, this I believe. But because this is what I believe, and more precisely, because this is who Jesus is, I am a follower of Jesus. He doesn’t just shape my mind and my head, but he also transforms my heart.

This past June, I was in Austin, TX for the EFCA National Conference. I went to a three part seminar on discipleship and leadership development taught by Larry Osborne. He began the first seminar with a simple question. “What is a disciple?” From this crowd of about 200 pastors, all kinds of answers were given and written down on the board up front. At the end of five minutes, you had this big robust definition of what a disciple looks like. To be honest with you, if that person, represented by that list, was standing up in front of that seminar, he might as well have been standing there with blue tights, a red cape and the letter “S” emblazoned on his chest. Perhaps, in this case, the letter “S” would stand for “Super-Saint” instead of “Superman.” And that is the problem. Larry Osborne suggested that we tend to make the definition for disciple so complicated that it often comes across as being unattainable or something to describe the “super-saint.”

Very simply, Osborne said, “a disciple is a follower.” It doesn’t matter if you just got in line or if you have been a follower of Jesus for several decades. No matter where you are in the line, you are a follower of Jesus. And the same question applies to everyone in that line as they follow Jesus. No matter where you stand in that line, the question that you need to ask yourself is simply this; “What is my next step of obedience?” In our passage this morning, Jesus tells Peter and Andrew, James and John that he is going to make them *“fishers of men.”* At the end of Matthew, in Matthew 28:19-20, he

commissions them to go fishing! He tells them to go and make disciples of nations by baptizing them and by *“teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.”* It is obedience. A disciple is a follower of Jesus, taking one step of obedience after another.

As we spend time in this passage this morning, I want us to look at both the invitation of Jesus and the response of these two sets of brothers. Jesus comes with this invitation, *“Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”* This invitation tells us three things about being a “follower.” First of all, a follower is a follower of Jesus. Jesus says, *“Follow me.”* Secondly, a follower of Jesus follows Jesus with others. You don’t follow Jesus by yourself. Jesus says, *“I will make you . . .”* which implies that they are walking in relationship with him. And then thirdly to follow Jesus means that you follow him on mission. He has given us something to do. We are to be *“fishers of men.”* That is the invitation of Jesus for us this morning. We are invited to follow Jesus. We are invited to follow Jesus with others. We are invited to join Jesus on mission. It is a mission that brings Jesus to others. I love how Matthew describes the response of Peter, Andrew, James and John to this invitation of Jesus. Rather emphatically, Matthew says of both sets of brothers, *“Immediately, they left their boat and their father and followed him.”* May that be our response this morning to this wonderful invitation to follow Jesus.

## **Follow Me**

The first thing Jesus says in this invitation is *“Follow me.”* It is a good reminder to us that our faith is not anchored in a system of belief, or a set of rules or a philosophy of life. No doubt, our faith encompasses those things. There are truths we believe and there are things we are called to do and not to do and there is an outlook on life that comes with our faith. But it is good to be reminded that at the very core of our faith stands a person. Truth is a person. Jesus is the Truth.

John tells us in John 1:17 that *“grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”* Jesus himself claimed in John 14:6, *“I am the way, the truth and the life.”* As Jesus stood on trial before Pilate, he said to Pilate, *“I have come into the world— to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”* To which Pilate muttered, much like our postmodern world, *“What is truth?”* It is as if he is asking if there is even such a thing as truth, and if there is, who is to say what is truth and what is not truth. But what Pilate failed to see was that “Truth” was standing right in front of him.

This invitation to follow Jesus is an invitation to follow a person. But why Jesus? What makes Jesus different than anyone else? The testimony of the Scriptures is that this Jesus

of Nazareth, seen in our passage “*walking by the Sea of Galilee*”, is God’s own eternal Son. Stephen Clark says that throughout Scripture, there is a “uniform conviction that Jesus Christ is God and man.”<sup>2</sup> Stephen Wellum adds, “In light of Scripture, the church has confessed consistently that to identify Jesus correctly we must affirm that he is the divine Son who has become incarnate, that to know him is life eternal, and that to know him not is judgment unto death. Biblically speaking, getting Christ right is a matter of life and death.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus is the unique Son of God and all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus. It is because of the unique nature of Jesus and the universal significance of Jesus that we rightly respond to his call to follow him.

It is interesting to me how this call to follow Jesus in Matthew 4 is nestled between two paragraphs that affirm the unique nature of Jesus. Prior to Matthew 4:18-22 in verses 12-17 we discover that this Jesus is the one the prophets of old spoke of with such hope. In verse 15 we read these words from the prophet Isaiah, “*The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.*” Of course, when Jesus issues this call to follow him he does so on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

This region of Israel, that is Galilee, is to the north and it is far removed from the religious center of the country which is down in the southern territory of Judea, that place that houses the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. The description of this region as “*Galilee of the Gentiles*” is a reminder of the gloom and doom that the prophet Isaiah spoke about when he made this prophetic statement. This region was about to be invaded and dominated by the Assyrians and a Gentile presence would be felt for centuries to come. And yet, it is to this region where “*the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light.*” It is just a few verses later in Isaiah 9 we read these familiar words, “*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*” To which Matthew is telling his Jewish readers, “this Jesus is that divine Son of God.” And so the message of Jesus, quite naturally, is summed up in verse 17, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” True Light came into this dark world bringing hope and peace and it first landed in a land filled with Jews and Gentiles. As Isaiah promised, “*Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forever more.*” This is who we follow when we follow the Lord Jesus.

And then immediately after our passage this morning, in Matthew 4:23-25, you see Jesus healing diseases and afflictions. John calls the miracles of Jesus “signs.” They are “signs”

that tell us that Jesus is the Son of God. In fact, John closes out his gospel account of the life of Jesus by saying of Jesus, *“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples . . . But these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you might have life in his name.”* And of course the greatest “sign” of all is what Paul says in Romans 1:4. Speaking of Jesus, he says, who *“was declared to be the Son of God in power . . . by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.”* This is who we follow. We follow a person. We follow the Lord Jesus!

When you read in our passage this morning of Jesus issuing a call to follow him, do you find it odd that immediately these two sets of brothers drop their nets and follow Jesus? How did they know that Jesus was worthy of dropping everything to follow him? There was no halo on his head. His clothes weren't transformed like on the Mount of Transfiguration to indicate that he was the Son of God. And yet they dropped everything to follow Jesus. First of all, you need to know that this was not their first interaction with Jesus. They first became acquainted with Jesus through John the Baptist. In John 1, it was John the Baptist who turned to Andrew and mostly likely John and pointed to Jesus and said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God!”* Do you know what Andrew did? We went and told his brother Peter, *“We have found the Messiah!”* It was here that Jesus issued his first invitation to them, *“Come and see!”*

They went with Jesus on a trip down to Jerusalem. On their way, they witnessed his first miracle of turning water to wine. They traveled to Jerusalem and celebrated the Passover together and they saw Jesus go into the Temple and turn over the tables of the money changers. They then were returning home and they passed through Samaria and they witnessed the grace and the kindness Jesus extended to a Samaritan woman, *“the woman at the well.”* As far as this band of Jewish travelers were concerned, this woman had three strikes against her; she was a Samaritan, she was a woman and she was a woman *“with a reputation.”* Yet through this woman, changed by the grace of Jesus, nearly an entire town ended up confessing of Jesus, *“we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”* Then they returned to Galilee and went back to fishing. It is at this point Jesus shows up and says to them, *“Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”* They saw all they needed to see and they knew that Jesus was the “Truth!”

Some of you are here this morning and you are operating under the invitation of *“Come and See!”* It is a legitimate invitation to receive. You are here, uncertain, but honestly checking out the claims of Jesus. We want you here and we want you to explore what it means to know Jesus. The first Sunday in October we have a seven week class at 9:30 called *“Exploring Faith.”* Take advantage of that opportunity. *“Come and see!”* But

there comes a point where you need to hear and respond to the second invitation from Jesus, *"Follow me."* You need to drop whatever you are holding in your hands that is preventing you from turning to Jesus and you need to simply "follow Jesus." Repent of your sin. Rely on what Jesus did for you on the cross by dying for your sin. Submit to Jesus as the Lord of your life. Simply put, you need to follow Jesus! He is the Son of God, the Savior and the Lord. When you follow Jesus, you find truth and life eternal.

### **Follow Jesus with Others**

I want you to notice something else about the invitation to follow Jesus. It is an invitation to follow Jesus with others. Jesus says, *"Follow me and I will make you . . ."* That phrase, *"I will make you . . ."* implies that there is an invitation to relationship. And furthermore, it is a relationship with purpose and intentionality. With an end goal in mind, Jesus says, *"I will make you . . ."*

This invitation is best understood within the Jewish framework in which it is given. It is interesting to me to consider "the time in history" when Jesus came into this world. Paul says in Galatians 4:4, *"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman."* One of the things to consider when we think of what made this "the fullness of time" is that at this time within Judaism the role of the rabbi was quite significant. In their book *Sitting At the Feet of Rabbi Jesus* Spangler and Tverberg said that when Jesus came he came during a "golden age of study that provided the germinating seed of Jewish thought today."<sup>4</sup> Within the generation prior to Jesus there were two prominent rabbis, Hillel and Shammai, from whom two prominent schools of thought were formed. Rabbi Hillel is the one who said, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole of the Torah. The rest is commentary." That sounds close to what Jesus said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, *"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."* I share this to simply say that it is helpful to understand the Jewish context of a rabbi so that we can understand the invitation Jesus gives to these two sets of brothers.

Most Jewish boys, by the time they turned 13 had memorized the entire Old Testament. They were then encouraged to study the interpretation of Torah, the Law, and that was called the *"Yoke of Torah."* It kind of changes our understanding of the invitation of Jesus who says to us, *"Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me."* Like a rabbi, Jesus is inviting us, his disciples, to take on his way of life. Then, at the age of 17-20, the best of the best, were encouraged to find a rabbi and to come under his teaching. Now when we hear teaching

we conjure up images of a classroom and the passing of information. But under a rabbi, the goal was not merely the gaining of knowledge. “The mission of the rabbi was to become a living example of what it means to apply God’s word to one’s life.”<sup>5</sup> The disciple would then follow the rabbi and he would learn by watching how the rabbi lived. They had a saying back then that went like this, the disciple would follow his rabbi so closely that he “would walk in the dust of his rabbi.”

Now if Peter and Andrew and John and James were tending to the family business of fishing, it would seem to imply that they were not “the best of the best.” Someone eventually came and put their arm around them and lovingly suggested that they ought to stick to fishing. But then Jesus comes to these average fishermen and he offers the opportunity for them to learn from him. They had already spent ample time with him and they were to some degree already convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. I think that they readily dropped their nets to follow Jesus because there was no higher calling in all the land than to follow after a rabbi, let alone the Messiah.

It was expected in this culture that the rabbi would raise up disciples who would then carry on his teaching and would demonstrate his way of life. When we think of Jesus, we often think of the message of the cross and how Jesus saves us from our sins. That is appropriate and very important and it is the heart of the gospel. But we must also understand the importance of the mission of Jesus to make disciples. Spangler and Tverberg remind us that “The goal of Jesus was to raise up disciples who would become like him. As followers of Jesus, we are still called to live out the adventure of discipleship.”<sup>6</sup> I am convinced, like the way of Jesus and the way of the rabbi, this way of life is caught as we follow Jesus together. “We walk in each other’s dust.”

This is why we encourage you to get into community and to take time to experience Christ in relationship. You get to see how Christ is being lived out within the hard realities of life. You get to talk about real life situations and you are able to encourage each other to follow after Christ. I really want to encourage you to follow Jesus with others. Do not go it alone. God uses his people to help us learn how to imitate Jesus in the way we live. Discipleship is really about walking together in the way of life given to us by Jesus. It is together that we are made into followers of Jesus.

### **Follow Jesus on Mission**

Finally, to follow Jesus means that you follow Jesus on mission. There is a mission. We are invited to be *fishers of men*. Matthew, Mark and Luke each record this invitation



Jesus gives to these two sets of brothers. And in each account, after the invitation, they respond by dropping their nets and following Jesus. Matthew and Mark don't give us much detail about this encounter. They just tell us that Jesus gave the invitation and these four young men immediately dropped their nets and followed Jesus. But Luke tells us something about this encounter that further explains the response of the disciples.

Luke 5 indicates that there was a crowd gathered along the shore. At the edge of the shore there were two boats and these four young men were tending to their nets after a long and tiring night of fishing. And so Jesus gets in one of the boats and he begins to teach the crowd. When he was done teaching, he turned to Peter and said, *"Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."* Peter mildly protested because they had been out all night and they didn't catch anything. I would imagine it was also quite a process to tidy up the nets when a night of fishing was over. But remember, Peter had already spent some time with Jesus and so he said, *"But because you say so, I will let down the nets."* And you know what happened next. When they let down their nets, there were so many fish that they needed help lifting them out of the water. Peter knew immediately that this was a miracle and he fell on his knees and said, *"Go away from me Lord; I am a sinful man."* At this point, Jesus offers these four young men the invitation, *"Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men."* And so Luke tells us, *"So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him."*

The invitation of Jesus is to join him on mission. And his mission is to reach others with the good news of Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal. The thing that encourages us to follow Jesus on mission is that like the story of Peter letting down his nets at the request of Jesus, this is the work of God. All he asks of us is that we let down our nets. Perhaps we might protest and say, "Lord, don't you know it is New England and we have been at it a long time and they don't seem to be biting." But he looks at us and invites us to follow him on mission and he asks us to simply put down our nets.

This is going to be the focus of our conversation this fall. We want to consider what it means to live as those who have been sent. We are going to first consider how God is a sending God. He sent his Son. He sent the Holy Spirit. He sends the church. And then we are going to consider what it means for us as individuals and as a church to live as those who are sent. It is our vision over the next ten years to see 2 to 3 churches planted. We want to start a residency program where we house and equip potential church planters to help us reach this goal. Why would we want to do this? Actually, it is a natural thing for us to want to do. God is a sending God. He wants us to go out into the sea and cast our nets and watch what he does when we follow him on mission.

## An Invitation

Jesus says, “*Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.*” Follow Jesus. Follow Jesus with others. Follow Jesus on mission. It is with this in mind, I want to offer you an invitation this morning. Following Jesus is as simple as taking your next step of obedience. It doesn’t matter where you are in the line, we all have a step to take. You may even still be in the “come and see” stage of faith. You can still take a step towards Jesus. My invitation for you is twofold this morning.

First of all, take your next step with others. If you are not connected into community, we want to connect you. We have 28 community groups meeting this fall and if you have an interest in making that connection, let us know at the church office and we will connect you to a group. Following Jesus is a journey we do with others.

Secondly, I would like to invite you to identify your next step of obedience. Remember, that is the question we all need to ask, no matter where we find ourselves in the line. Take our “Way of Life” and consider the list of 25 different “steps of obedience” one could take in their journey of faith. We are asking you to identify one step you want to take next. It could be the step of weekly coming to the worship service, or growing in prayer, or engaging in relationship, or resolving a conflict, or intentionally investing in someone younger, or intentionally engaging in missions. Or maybe there is a step you want to take that is not on this list. In our Community Groups we are going to share with each other what that step is we would like to take over the next 10 weeks so that we can be an encouragement to each other as we seek to follow Jesus.

So . . . Follow Jesus! He is the Son of God. Follow Jesus with others. Take a step into intentional community. Follow Jesus on mission. Join us this fall as we consider what it means to live sent lives. May the nets be full!

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen J. Wellum *God the Son Incarnate* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016)

<sup>2</sup>Stephen Clark, “Introduction” in *The Forgotten Christ: Exploring the Majesty and Mystery of God Incarnate*, ed. Stephen Clark (Nottingham: Alollos, 2007) 9

<sup>3</sup>Wellum, 37

<sup>4</sup>Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) Kindle Reader 477

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., Kindle Reader 549

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., Kindle Reader 563

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## COMMUNITY GROUPS

### Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Share something that is happening in your life that we can celebrate.
2. Share something that is happening in your life that is a concern.
3. Spend some time looking at “Our Way of Life” and from the list provided identify a “next step of obedience” you would like to work on over the next ten weeks.

### Diving Into The Word

4. Read Matthew 4:18-22. Pay particular attention to the invitation of Jesus in verse 19. What observations do you make about this invitation?
5. Read Matthew 4:12-17 and 23-25. What do you discover about Jesus in these passages that make you want to follow him?
6. In Matthew 4:19 Jesus says “*I will make you . . .*” Why is it important that when we follow Jesus we follow with others? How do “others” contribute to making you a follower of Jesus. Can you give some examples of how you have been influenced by others?
7. Read Luke 5:1-11. What is the lesson for us in this story as we are invited to follow Jesus on mission?

### Taking It Home

8. Share one thing you are taking with you from your conversation?