



Christian Crusaders

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Jesus Is: Calling

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TEXT: Matthew 4:18-22 (ESV)

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, He [Jesus] 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.

Dear friends:

A number of years ago, Chan Gailey, football coach for the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets, told how he learned a little lesson in humility. He was the head coach of Alabama's Troy State, and they were playing for a national championship. The week before the big game he was headed to the practice field when a secretary called him back for a phone call. Somewhat irritated, he told her to take a message because he was on his way practice. She responded "but it's Sports Illustrated." "I'll be right there" he said. As he made his way to the building he began thinking about the upcoming article. It would be great publicity for a small school like Troy State to be in Sports Illustrated. As he got closer, he realized that a three-page article would not be sufficient to tell the whole story. Coming even closer to his office he started thinking he might be on the cover! "Should I pose, or go with an action shot?" he wondered. His head was spinning with all kinds of possibilities. When he picked up the phone and said "hello", the person asked "is this Chan Gailey?" "Yes it is" he replied confidently. "This is Sports Illustrated, and we're calling to let you know that your subscription is running out. Are

you interested in renewing?" Coach Gailey concluded his story by saying "you are either humble or you will be humbled."

You know, we receive all kinds of calls in life, don't we? Junk calls, usually an automatic robotic voice: "congratulations, we have picked you to go on this trip." Or a voice offering to update your car warranty. There's spam and scam calls. "This is the Social Security office, and we need your Social Security number to get your account straightened out." Fundraising calls: "this is your alma mater, we're doing a capital campaign and we need your financial help." Of course there are personal calls from family and friends who are checking in with us. Then there those bothersome calls from people you don't really want to talk with because they're irritating and interrupting your day. Surveys, for instance. Or crank calls, or prank calls, or business calls from customers, bosses, or colleagues. Some calls, though, we receive are quite memorable and important to us. I remember when my congregation called me up, said "Steve, we just voted and we want you to come and be our pastor." Or a call from my grown-up son or daughter, "dad, we just had a baby boy!" Important calls.

Today I want to talk with you about the most important call you will ever receive in your life. Because, you see, in our passage for today we come across the calling of Andrew and Peter and James and John by Jesus. He saw these fisherman with nets in their hands by the sea of Galilee and He called out to them "follow Me." To follow someone means to come after them. Start going, moving in their direction. Get behind Him. And they responded, amazingly. They dropped what they were doing, left behind their businesses, and followed. Everything: business, family left behind. And they traipsed after Him in faith. They had some previous exposure to Jesus according to John's gospel. Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist. He told Andrew that Jesus was the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Andrew was intrigued by this, and so he followed Jesus home and spent some time with Him and was convinced! He went home and told his brother Simon Peter "we found the Messiah!" And then Andrew brought Peter to meet Jesus, and then he stayed on, learning more. So later on, when Jesus comes to them and calls them by the Sea of Galilee to follow Him, they went with Him. They'd had some time, I suppose, to think about what they'd learned. They followed. They didn't know where He would lead them, but they went in faith. And their lives were never the same after that, were they? They began following Jesus, and that involved living with Him 24/7. Getting to know Him. Learning from His wisdom as He taught them. Observing Him as He went throughout the villages, teaching and preaching and doing a miraculous miracles like the healing of people and casting out demons. They watched His compassion towards all kinds of people, and His faith in His Heavenly Father impressed them every step of the way. They were excited about Him and growing in faith as they lived with Him. After a while they experienced the

thrill of even serving Him in His kingdom cause, when He authorized and sent them out on their own, two by two, to preach the good news of the kingdom of God in the villages, heal, and cast out demons. Now, it wasn't very easy following Jesus. They would watch him face off day after day with hostile opponents from Israel's religious establishment. And later on they would actually have to watch him die a horrific death on the cross. It was also eye-opening and life-changing that three days after that crucifixion they saw Him alive again. They also saw Him ascend to His Father in power and authority after they were given a commission by Him to go make disciples of all nations. To be His witnesses. At Pentecost they experienced the promise of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon them, just as He said, empowering them to turn their world upside down as they spread the good news of Christ's death and resurrection. And they were changed men. Big-time changed! Their lives would never be the same after being with Christ, now filled with the Spirit. Their lives were better, more satisfying, very significant. And just think: it all began with an obedient, positive response to a call along the sea of Galilee. "Follow Me." And from there, the adventure of a new life with Jesus Christ began for those men.

Friends, that same call has never stopped coming. That call comes to us today from risen Jesus Christ – He's alive. He's still calling people to follow Him. To follow Him involves stepping into a living relationship or a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. A person, you see, can still have a close walk with Jesus as those disciples did. Oh, you may not be able to see Him, but You can learn from Him and His word. Talking, listening to Him in prayer. Praising Him in worship. Serving the needs of others in His name, you'll encounter Him. And that's how you come to know Him in a very personal, dynamic way, and learn more and more to trust Him and believe that He really does know what is best for your life. And let me tell you what following Christ leads to: it leads to salvation. God wants all people to be saved, according to scripture. And the means of being saved is entering into a relationship with Jesus Christ, who died on a cross to pay for our sins, and rose again. He is the means to enter God's kingdom of light, of receiving God's forgiveness for sin, and the promise of everlasting life. He's the Way, the Truth, the Life God wants for us, and no one comes to the Father but through Him. He told us that Himself. Following Him also leads a person to positive personal changes in one's life. Life with Jesus is life-changing. The apostle Paul describes for us the fruit of the Spirit that God wants to put in our lives through our relationship with Jesus: love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and gentleness and generosity and self-control. Boy, that's going to make for some rich relationships with other people besides, isn't it? I mean, as someone once said, Jesus loves you just as you are, but He refuses to leave you that way." He wants to make you like Himself.

We learned in this story that to follow Jesus also leads to new adventures, beyond your wildest dreams, as you receive a new eternal purpose which is challenging and satisfying. You know when He said "follow Me" he also added on "I will make you fishers of men." As we follow Jesus and actually obey His command to be His witness to everyone, and tell everyone we know about Him with our words and our actions... As we step out in His name and fish for people right alongside of the risen Savior... As we experience the joy of being used as His instruments in this world, bringing others into a saving relationship with Christ... Let me tell you, life does not get any better than that! I can tell you that from my own personal experiences leading people to Jesus. And let me tell you whenever people have responded positively to Christ's call to follow Him, their lives have always been changed for the better. Now I'm not saying it's an easier life that Jesus is offering you and me. Jesus never promised that. In fact, the follower of Jesus Christ will find that he or she is not immune from the hardships of living in what we know is a sinful, broken world. And Jesus Himself tells us that following Him will involve "carrying a cross". There will be some suffering, some sacrifice in this hostile world that rejects Him, as we bring the good news message who He is and what He has done for the world. It's not easy, but still, it's a much better life... No, wait a minute, let me correct myself: it's the best life a person can have. Jesus called it "the abundant life" He came to give.

Isn't it interesting that those first disciples that Jesus called (except for one: Judas) stayed the course in following Jesus. I mean they actually put their lives on the line for Him. They were imprisoned and beaten and martyred for Jesus. Why did they do that? Why they stick with Him? The answer to that is they had found the life they were looking for in Jesus. There were no regrets, only rejoicing in Christ.

I think of another disciple who came onto the scene later on named Paul, who was [once] a great persecutor of the faith, and he wrote these words: "for me to live is Christ." He said there's nothing compared to knowing and serving Jesus Christ, the rest is just garbage in comparison. He said in his life could be expressed a simply being compelled by the love of Christ working in him.

I'd like to ask you a personal question today: have you responded positively to the most important call you will ever receive? The call from Jesus to follow Him? Oh, I'm not talking about some sort of "easy believism": say "yes" and say a prayer and go on with our life as if nothing has changed. No, I'm asking have you given your unqualified trust and obedience to the Lord of the universe, Jesus Christ? Does Jesus have the highest priority? Is your relationship with Him the supreme relationship, out of which every other relationship and activity is defined and directed? How would you answer that?

My appeal is that you not ignore or reject His call to follow, as so many do. Follow Him! I know that in life some calls I get on the phone I don't answer because I reason with myself "I'm too busy with something more important, I don't want to be interrupted." Well this call is way too important for any individual to ignore. Follow Jesus with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. This is one call you do not want to miss. With the lack of good, trustworthy leadership in our world today there might be for you a certain amount of reluctance to entrust your life to anything, or to anyone, or any kind of leader. But I want you to remember this: this call comes from One who died for your sins and rose again victorious over the power of sin and death and the devil. And He sits in authority over this world, and He loves you very, very much. He died for you, He rose for you, He is the leader you can trust with your life and he has your best interests in mind. He's been teaching me that again and again and again as I've walked with Him. To follow Jesus Christ and have a personal relationship with Him is life to the max.

You know, I do a lot of reading and I recently read an inspiring testimony by Dr. Rosalind Picard, a renowned professor at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). She writes that her first 20 years of life were spent thinking that religious people were ignoramuses, and that she was too smart to buy into this "God thing". But through a series of encounters with some Christians that she admired, she came to realize her arrogance and that she was being a fool, snubbing "the greatest mind in the cosmos" as she put it. She asked Jesus to be the Lord, the leader of her life. She followed Jesus. She writes:

Have you ever tried to assemble something mechanical, and it only kind of works? Maybe the wheels spin, but not smoothly. Then you realize you were missing a piece. When you finally put it together correctly, it works beautifully. This is how it felt when I handed my life over to God: I thought it had worked fine before, but after it was 'fixed,' it worked exponentially better. That's not to say nothing bad ever happened to me – far from it. But in all things, good and bad, I could count on God's guidance, comfort, and protection. So the day I walk humbly alongside the most amazing companion, Jesus Christ, the most amazing companion anyone could ask for, I am filled with desire to keep learning and exploring.

Do you have that kind of relationship with Jesus? You can. As Jesus called Peter and Andrew and James and John and the apostle Paul, and millions of others since, and Rosalind Picard, Jesus is calling you. "Follow me, I'll make you fishers of men." Commit yourself to follow Jesus. Trust Him. Obey Him. Serve Him. And you will discover for yourself that He is the way to go, that He is the truth to believe, and He is the life that God wants for you.

Amen