

## **Your Life's Calling, Revealed!** (Sermon Based on Mark 1:14-20)

Everyone has had tough days from time to time, days when for whatever reason, your life just seems sad. Maybe those days that come in the middle of winter, when the holidays are over, you've put on ten pounds, and now you're back at work and just can't stand your job, and life just crawls slowly along. Or maybe you are older and you have one of those days that you miss your spouse so badly, are so lonely, and you just don't know why God is keeping you here. Or maybe you're young, with an entire life in front of you, but it all seems so confusing and often so disappointing, that you're just not very excited about where it seems to be going. Wherever you are in life, chances are that you've had a day like that somewhere along the line, when life's luster is just gone, and you feel like you're doing so little that matters and you start asking those questions: "What am I really here for?" "What's the point?"

Today I would like to answer those questions, so that the next time you find yourself having one of those days, you'll be a little better prepared to fight it. This morning I want to talk about why you are here and what your purpose is, because that's really what Jesus was talking about as he preached to his disciples and called them as he walked along the Sea of Galilee.

So let's turn back to the Lord's words. The Gospel says, "...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!"<sup>1</sup> The men who heard this message had fairly normal, standard jobs. And after a long, hard day of fishing, these men may have periodically asked themselves, "Is there more? What am I doing with my life?"—you know, the same kinds of questions I was just talking about. But if these men ever had such questions, they began to disappear when they were introduced to the teaching of Jesus, and the teaching of John the Baptist before him. John and Jesus called those men to "Repent and believe the good news." They gave them a calling for their lives, a purpose. And the call to repent and believe the good news is your calling as well. It is the calling of every Christian.

Your purpose in life is to understand, first of all, that the time has come to repent for all the ways we've failed to live up to the calling we have received as Christians. Now is the time for us to look at our lives as they stack up against the Ten Commandments, to examine whether or not we've have gone into every day trusting God above all things, expecting that my good God will only allow good things into my life, trusting that I have a God who is completely in control and who loves me? Now is the time to heed your calling by looking at your hearts and examining whether you ever get unnecessarily angry at your spouses, whether you get unnecessarily annoyed at your children, whether we ever look a little too long upon those things which we know are not meant for Christian eyes. Your calling from the Lord Jesus is to make your entire life one of repentance.

But now is also the time for the second part of your call: to "believe the good news." If you are honest with yourself, your self-examination will show that your life has been ruined by your sins. But since there have been plenty of times when you have lived as if you had no purpose, Christ lived a purposeful life for you. Since you haven't lived life like you should, Jesus lived a life like you should, and since he loves you, he was punished in the way that you should have been punished, taking away the punishment that you deserved. That's the good news that Christ calls you to believe. Jesus opened up a new life to you that began when you believed and that will continue forever. And your calling is to believe that with your whole heart. Your call to believe is a call that brings joy, peace, and confidence for your future.

But Jesus' call continues. After telling his disciples to repent and believe the good news, he looked straight at them and gave them the rest of their calling. Listen again to the account:

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." At once they left their nets and followed him. 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.<sup>2</sup>

Like Jesus told those men to follow him, he wants you to follow him as well. Every one of us Christians has the call to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and to follow him. It's a call that's difficult, but it's also a call that's wonderful. It's difficult because it's not natural. Naturally, we follow ourselves—what's good for us. And since Jesus' call isn't exactly natural, it isn't exactly easy. Think about the twelve disciples that Jesus called. They certainly failed in their calling at times. Think about the time that James and John came up to Jesus and said, "Lord we want you to do whatever we ask!" And when Jesus said, "Well, what's that?" they said, "When you come into

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<sup>1</sup>All Scripture is taken from: *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1996, c1984. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. (Mark 1:14-15).

<sup>2</sup>Mark 1:16-20.

your kingdom, have one of us sit at your right and one of us at your left!” They were showing that, deep down, they wanted payment for their sacrifice of leaving their father’s fishing business. And Peter failed in his calling at times as well. When his best friend was about to be killed, he wouldn’t even admit that he knew who he was—because God forbid he lose a hair of his head trying to stick up for Jesus. So don’t think that life as a Christian will be a cakewalk. It’s not easy to stay a follower of Christ. Peter, in his epistle, says that at times following our call means that we’ll have to “suffer in our bodies.”<sup>3</sup> What he’s saying is that sometimes it hurts to not give in to sin. It’s hard to give up pleasures of this world. For example, have you ever tried to stop drinking, smoking, or eating unhealthy food? If so, then you know that there are times when it seems nearly impossible for you to stop yourself from having “just one” cigarette, or “just one” drink, or “just one more” piece of desert. It can really hurt to not have that one more desert, drink, or cigarette at those times. It can even seem impossible. And that’s what trying to deny our sinful nature can be like. It can really hurt, and it can seem almost impossible.

My friends, until you die, you’re going to live in two kingdoms: the kingdom of this world, and the Kingdom of God. And many people who only live in one of those kingdoms don’t understand those who live in both. Peter says that those who live (as we used to live) in lust, drunkenness and idolatry “think it’s strange that you don’t plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation and they heap abuse on you.” Understand if you are going to live a life of repentance, belief in Christ’s grace, and following in his steps, you will suffer. You stick up for your faith once, and you get a reputation. You get labeled. You get excluded. You get left out.

Christ himself said that since his disciples weren’t of this world, the world would hate them. And he was absolutely right. Think of the lives of the apostles. Until Paul came to Christ, his life had been relatively comfortable. But afterwards, he was beaten, shipwrecked, flogged and eventually beheaded. Think of Andrew and Peter. As far as we know, they were both crucified. In fact, all of the apostles, minus John, were murdered for their faith. So yes, the call that Christ gives you, the call to believe in him and follow him, is a difficult call.

**But** it is also wonderful beyond imagination. There was a reason why the disciples were all willing to die for that call. “We must obey God rather than men!”<sup>4</sup> was their happy battle cry because they knew that to follow Jesus is to step into freedom. It is to repent of your failures, forget about your sins because Christ has taken them away forever, and it is to serve because we want to, not because we have to. The disciples loved to follow Christ because they had seen real love, and they wanted nothing more than to share that love. They followed Christ because they knew how much better his path was than the paths that people naturally choose are. They knew how good it is to have a noble and true purpose for life and for eternity. They knew that life is so much better when you have something to fight for. And we are in a war; we are Christian soldiers. Christ called us into his service. He’s called you to follow him. And you can do that in all sorts of ways. Fathers and Mothers follow their calls when they work hard to support their families, when they love and support each other—when they’re agreeable and when they’re not so agreeable. They follow Christ’s call when they freely forgive each other. People follow their calls when they, like the disciples, become fishers of men and share the messages of sin and of greater grace. People follow their calls by using their money to support those who go to places to fish for men where they cannot go. People at Trinity follow their calls when they simply offer kind words of love, forgiveness, and hope with someone in need. There are a myriad of ways to follow the wonderful call of God.

And remember, in his grace, God has promised that anyone who left the things of this world to follow him will not fail to receive 100 times as much in the next life. So continue to hear the word of God because it gives you the encouragement that you need to follow your call. God grant that whatever you do in your life, whether you work in a factory, farm, or office; whether you’re a student or retired, you would remember your true calling to make your entire life one of repentance, to believe that your sins are gone forever, and to deny yourself, and to follow Jesus until you step into heaven. Amen.

Votum: “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. 4:1

<sup>4</sup> Acts 5:29

<sup>5</sup> 1 Pet. 5:10-11