

Fishing in Galilee - Mark 1:14-20

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Our story today from the book of Mark takes place in the area surrounding the Sea of Galilee. This body of water has many names. Lake of Gennesaret, Lake Kinneret and Sea of Tiberias are some of the more common ones. So, as you can see, it is sometimes called a sea, and sometimes a lake. I will try to help you visualize how big it is. The city of Lancaster is 18 square miles. The Sea of Galilee is 64 square miles. So, it's over three times the size of Lancaster. The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by mountains to the north, east, and west. They rise sharply over 2,500 feet from the water elevation, which is about 685 feet below sea level. It's a little bit like paradise with hot mineral springs, grapes and figs that grow 10 months out of the year, and lush wheat and barley fields. In the 1st century, it was quite a busy place. The 1st century historian, Flavius Josephus, mentioned that there were 230 boats in the fishing industry on the Sea of Galilee. In fact, it was the central hub of Galilee. Most of the action in Galilee took place around its shores. Several cities thrived around the Sea of Galilee, each having at least 15,000 people. (Learning all of this has made me want to visit sometime.) So, this is the setting for our story today.

So, let's begin now with our story from Mark 1:14-20. *After John was put in prison, Jesus began His ministry in Galilee. Jesus called four men to be His disciples: Simon, Andrew, James and John. These men chose to leave their occupation as fishermen in order to become fishers of men.*

We will first consider what Jesus experienced in this story, and then what Simon, Andrew, James, and John experienced. So, what did Jesus experience? First of all, he experienced loss. Mark says that it was after John was put in prison that Jesus came preaching in Galilee. This statement tells us a couple things. First, it tells us that Jesus has lost His cousin John. John is now in prison. Mark will tell us later in chapter 6 that it was King Herod who had John thrown into prison. John was not only Jesus' cousin but he was Jesus' partner in ministry. He had been the voice crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord!" (Mark 1:3) John had been calling for repentance and pointing people to Jesus for about two years now. And now, his voice is hushed. His presence is gone. And Jesus feels the loss. The second thing this statement tells us is that about 1 ½ years have passed, since our last story, where Jesus was in the wilderness. John is the only Gospel writer who records what happened in this year and a half. Most of this time Jesus has been in Judea. Turn with me to John 3:22-24. (Read) John and Jesus are both preaching and baptizing in Judea at this time. But, as John records in chapter 5 of his Gospel account, the Jews in Judea rejected Jesus less than a year later. They started plotting to kill Him, because He didn't honor their extra-biblical traditions. Jesus experiences loss. He is rejected in Judea about the same time that John is put in prison.

Jesus continues His ministry in spite of His loss. And thus He also experiences a preacher's life. Mark records that He entered Galilee preaching. Jesus would also do a lot of healing, but He began His work preaching. I would have loved to hear Him preach. He drew huge crowds of people. As we shall see, He had a message that caught people's attention. But being anointed and empowered by the Spirit, I'm sure His delivery was captivating. His message was rather simple. Mark says He came preaching the "gospel of the kingdom of God". The Jews had been waiting for the kingdom of God for a long time. They had been waiting for their King to come and set up His kingdom in Judea. But as we learned in Mark 1:1-3, the kingdom of God came first to dwell in people's hearts. To the Jews who had been waiting for their Messiah, their King, for so long, Jesus' preaching about the kingdom of God was good news indeed. ("gospel" means "good news")

Jesus also preached that "the time is fulfilled". Mark uses the same Greek word, translated, "time", in Mark 13:33. Turn there with me. In Mark 13 Jesus is speaking about the end of time. In verses 26 and 27 Jesus has described His Second Coming. And now He refers to it again in verse 33. (Read) The "time" is an event we're all waiting for – Jesus' Second Coming. The "time" Jesus is preaching about in Mark is an event the Jews for all waiting for – the coming of the Messiah. As the SDA Bible Commentary states (Vol. 5 pg. 55), the whole nation, whether educated Pharisees or common people, "hungered for the Messiah". With all their differences and disagreements this is one thing they both desired above all else. Jesus' message resonated with people. It was like music to their ears. Finally, "the time" had come. The Messiah was here!

Jesus, like John, called for a response from the people. "Repent and believe in the gospel" He said. We learned about repentance from John's message. It means to change your mind about sin. It means you see your sins as God sees them. As Peter says in Acts 5:31, repentance is a gift, just like forgiveness. I cannot repent any more than I can forgive my own sins. I cannot repent unless the Holy Spirit gives it to me. For me to see my sins as God sees them is a miracle. By nature, I love sin. I feel comfortable with sins in my life. They're like old friends. I identify them as part of who I am. But God, by nature, hates sin. So, for me to see my sins as He sees them is a miracle. Jesus preached that in order to receive the kingdom of God, the Jews had to repent of their sins. When God gave them repentance, they could then "believe in the gospel". They could experience the good news. Their King could set up His kingdom in their hearts.

So, Jesus experiences loss in our story today. He also experiences the life of a preacher. And third, He experiences the process of looking for disciples. It was typical in the Jewish culture for rabbis (teachers) to have disciples, or followers. John himself had disciples. In fact, John records in his Gospel that two of them became Jesus' disciples – John (not to be confused with John the Baptist) and Andrew. So, for Jesus to be looking for disciples was a common practice. But His method was not. His invitation to Simon, Andrew, James, and John in our story today was unique. Turn with me to John 1:40-42. John and Andrew have left John the Baptist in order to follow Jesus. Now notice what Andrew does. (Read) Andrew invites his brother, Simon, to follow Jesus, too. This event takes place right after Jesus left the wilderness, and 1 ½ years before our story today. So, why is Jesus looking for disciples in our story, if He already had some disciples? He is going beyond the normal commitment that was typically expected of disciples. Normally, a teacher's disciples would accompany their rabbi when they were not working. They weren't with them all the time. But Jesus is calling for a complete commitment. He is asking them to be with Him day and night. What He wanted them to experience required more than just hearing Him preach. They had to know who He was. The only way they could really know this would be by constantly being with Him. Jesus wanted them to become who He was, not to just learn what He said.

So, this is what Jesus experienced in our story today. How about Simon, Andrew, James, & John? What do they experience? First, we will start with a little clarification. Simon, Andrew's brother, had several names. Two of them came after he met Jesus – Cephas and Peter. They both mean "stone" or "rock". Cephas is from the Aramaic word, Kepha. Peter is from the Greek word, petros. So Simon, Peter, and Cephas are all the same person. Now, let's look at what Simon, Andrew, James, and John experienced before Jesus. What was their life like before they met Him? They grew up in a culture where the family was the center of society. They received their education from their parents. Mark mentions in verse 20 of chapter 1 of our story today that James and John's father, Zebedee, was in the boat with them. Being fishermen ran in the family. They were in a family business. Their father had taught them a trade. This was how it worked in this culture. You didn't go to school to become educated and find a job. Your father taught you a trade. He also taught you about everything else you would ever learn. Your home was your school. It was only the more wealthy families who could afford to send their children to the formal Jewish schools, which were few in number until quite a few years after the

time in which our story today takes place. Most families needed their children to work in the fields or in the boats on the lake. But even the formal schools were pretty simple. Their main textbook was the Torah. Maybe a little basic reading and math was thrown in, but that was it.

There were many different occupations in Galilee at this time. According to ancient Jewish literature there were 40 kinds of trades. These included farmers, woodcutters, shoe makers, bakers, and well-diggers. There were also tailors, builders, butchers, dairymen, barbers, laundrymen, jewelers, potters, and painters. We hear a lot about farmers, fishermen, and shepherds in the Bible, but these were only a few of the trades at this time.

So, Simon, Andrew, James, and John came from a simple background. All they knew that had learned at home. They were simple people and hard workers. And, of course, they were strong believers in the five books of Moses, which distinguished them as Jews.

So, what was their experience after Jesus? Well, I think it's safe to say that Jesus changed everything for them. They were never the same afterwards. Ever since they were little children, they had been waiting for the Messiah to come. Finally, He had come in their lifetime.

But in our story today they are taking a "risk". They are following a rabbi who is not accepted by their religious leaders. They are following a rabbi who has left His trade as a carpenter. So, they will have no means of income. Mark records that their fishing enterprise employed "hired servants". So they must have had a successful business. They are leaving this behind. They are giving their very lives and future into Jesus' hands. His work and ministry is now their life.

I don't know if they understood fully what they were doing at this time. But I believe the Spirit of God was moving their hearts. Jesus' preaching had moved them. They longed for more time with Him. They were drawn to Him. Their job seemed to pull them away from what their hearts wanted. But now with Jesus' call, their attachment to their careers disappears. Having more time with Jesus outweighs their sense of need for employment as fishermen. They leave it all and follow Jesus. Mark assures us that Simon, Andrew, James, and John didn't leave father Zebedee hanging without any help. Unlike any of the other gospels, Mark mentions that there were hired servants, or paid employees.

So, this is what Jesus and His four disciples experience. How is Jesus revealed in our story as an example of a healthy and dangerous Christian? First, He met people where they were. He went to the Sea of Galilee, the main gathering place of people in Galilee. Jesus didn't use a fortress mentality. He didn't wait for people to come to Him. He went where they physically were. But He also went where they mentally and culturally were. He spoke their language. He preached about the "kingdom of God", which was their greatest hope. He described ministry to fishermen as being "fishers of men". They could understand that analogy. Working with Jesus would be like catching fish. They could handle that. That made sense to them. So, a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who is in touch with their culture. Growing up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I can say we often live in our own culture. We become ignorant of the culture around us. Often we are speaking the language of last century's culture. Culture changes over time, and we must stay in touch with it. This is the only way to reach people like Jesus did.

Jesus is also an example of a healthy and dangerous Christian in that He didn't give up. He was forced out of Judea. So, He went to Galilee. A healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who is driven to find those who are waiting for their ministry. There are people in Lancaster who need you. You might not have met them yet.

But they're out there. Always pray for God to lead you to someone who needs to hear what you know about their Savior Jesus Christ.

Third, I believe this story reveals Jesus as an example of a healthy and dangerous Christian in that He looked for people to mentor. He realized that if He went back to heaven and no one else had become like Him, He would be a failure. He called men to follow Him so they could become like Him. He modeled for them what they needed to become. He taught what He wanted them to teach. A healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who shares what they know. Don't let what you know go to waste. Don't let what you've learned in life follow you to the grave. Share it with someone. A healthy and dangerous Christian looks for someone to mentor, so that when they are gone, their wisdom and influence remain.

Imagine yourself walking along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. In all the faces of this Jewish center of commerce, who do you see? Jesus picked out Simon, Andrew, James, and John. These were men He already knew. These men had responded to His message. Their hearts grasped what He was all about. Jesus chose them because there was already a connection. What about you? Who do you see? Someone in your family? Maybe you see a friend or neighbor. Maybe it's someone you work with. I challenge you to pick one person. Pick one person to mentor. Some of us never had anyone mentor us. If that's the case, then be the mentor you never had. Oh, imagine what God could do in a short amount of time if we all did what Jesus did. He eventually took 12 men and mentored them for only a couple years. When Jesus died, His wisdom and influence remained. He left behind a small group of healthy and dangerous Christians that shook the world. What about today? Can this happen again? I believe it not only can, but will. The question is, "Will it happen with us?"