

The King's Invitation (Matthew 4:18-25)

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[0 : 00] This is the word of the Lord. As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, called Peter, and his brother Andrew.

They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. Come, follow me, Jesus said, and I will make you fish with me.

At once, they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John.

They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom.

And healing every disease and sickness among the peoples. News about him spread all over Syria. And people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases.

[1 : 07] Those suffering severe pain, the demon possessed. Those having seizures and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed him.

This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. So, this is all? Okay.

So, I made an Instagram account for the first time in 2018, right? So, today I have 84 followers and 53 people that I'm following.

[2 : 27] Cristiano Ronaldo has 241 million followers and 458 people that he's following. And then, so, I've heard that you look better when you have more followers and less people that you're following, right?

But as my 80 followers will know, I don't really post that much. The last time I posted was actually in March last year. I don't really use Instagram or TikTok or Twitter.

But I think you don't really need to use them that often to appreciate the dark headlines that we've been seeing recently. The last time I was talking about is the one who was on Facebook and Instagram.

Teenage girl kills herself after Instagram poll in Malaysia. Police investigating after she asked her followers to choose death or life and 69% voted for death. Rise in teen suicide connected to social media popularity, the study.

And even in our very own country at home, this new initiative, this QE initiative called I'm Enough is focused on developing coping strategies for young New Zealanders who have anxiety and depression because of social media.

[3 : 46] So in a time where we are bombarded with social media, what does it actually mean to follow someone? For most of us on social media, influencers display a product that we like, and then we click the follow button, and that's it.

But as a Christian, what does it mean to follow Jesus? As we move into this next part of the Gospel of Matthew, which Pastor William has just read, we see this idea of following coming up again and again, three times, actually.

And each time we see that Jesus, he requires something more than just a half-hearted click or a like and subscribe. He requires three things, and those are the three things we're going to look at today.

He requires a response. He requires sacrificial obedience. And he requires intimacy. And so before we start reading from God's Word, let's pray.

Heavenly Father, Lord, thank you for your Word. Your Word that's not only living, but that produces life when it speaks.

[5 : 03] Lord, thank you for your Son and his invitation to all of us, not just his 12 disciples, to follow hard after him. Holy Spirit, would you please just not guide our minds into understanding, Lord, but mold and shape our hearts and desires into sons and daughters who would know how to respond to following you.

Lord, we want to see you for who you really are tonight. Show us your love so we can step into you wholeheartedly. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. So the first point we're going to look at is a call that demands a response.

So let's start with verse 19. And we see here Jesus, he's starting his ministry in the Galilee region. We see that he doesn't make his first public appearance where everyone expects him to.

This isn't Jerusalem, the center for religious power, which is about 100 kilometers south of Galilee. In fact, it's the direct opposite. We heard last week it's Galilee of the Gentiles, a land of darkness, a land under the shadow of death.

[6 : 27] So the very simple fact of where Jesus starts his ministry already challenges people's expectations of what the Messiah would look like.

Now we're on the edge of the sea of Galilee. Now we're on the edge of the sea of Galilee, and this is the sea of Galilee, a large freshwater lake surrounded by mountains to the east and to the west. It's warm and it's balmy all year round with clear sandy beaches and plenty of fish to catch. Now in verse 18, we see Jesus is walking beside this lake.

When he sees the first set of brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew, they were fishermen and they were right in the middle of their day jobs. Jesus calls out to them, come, follow me, and I will send you to fish for people.

Immediately, we notice a couple of things about Jesus' invitation. We notice that Jesus' invitation finds the disciples where they are.

[7 : 31] So Simon Peter and his brother Andrew were simply doing their thing with their net right in their hands when they were interrupted. They didn't run around seeking the call.

The call came to them. And just like with wedding invitations and party invitations, it's not really up to the guests to go and gather the invites themselves.

It's the host or the bride and groom who extend the invitation in the first place. And Jesus was the one who did the inviting. We notice also that Jesus' invitation, it's relatable.

They're fishermen. They're not teachers of the law. They're not Jewish rabbis. So Jesus seems to use language, if we look at verse 19, that they would understand. They're going from catching fish to catching people.

And this doesn't obviously mean they're going to throw their nets and catch literal people, but Jesus was going to use the disciples to grow the kingdom of God. And he's challenging them to dream big, to focus on things that don't spoil, but to focus on people that have eternal consequences.

[8 : 41] But finally, and most importantly, I think, we notice that Jesus' invitation requires or demands a response.

It didn't allow any time for questions. Peter didn't ask, what is following Jesus going to look like? Do I have to go now or are you going to still be here? Same time, tomorrow.

We see that Peter and Andrew didn't even respond with any words. Right? They respond with immediate, concrete action.

At once, they left their nets and followed him. It seems pretty unbelievable how two disciples could respond so quickly and give up everything at the drop of a hat.

But Matthew, we find out, in recording this immediate response, isn't trying to put the focus on praising the two disciples for their obedience.

[9 : 40] No, he's actually pointing us to the person of Jesus Christ himself, who Jesus is. So this encounter is actually evidence of the absolute and direct authority of Jesus Christ.

So it's Jesus who calls. And because it's Jesus, Peter follows at once. Jesus isn't calling here as a great teacher or a miraculous healer or an all-round good person, but as Christ, the Son of God.

So in these very short nine words, Matthew shows that Jesus, he holds a different, out-of-this-world authority. And when the Son of God calls you, the only right response is to obey immediately.

I think the King's invitation to respond speaks firstly to those of us who might not have experienced being in a love relationship with Jesus.

To those of us in that category, he says, come, follow me. In 1948, so before a lot of us were born, W.H. Auden, who is a British poet, he wrote a very, very long poem.

[11:01] So long that it was actually a book, so it was a book poem, called *The Age of Anxiety*. And it reflects on human beings' quest to find substance and identity and meaning in a world that's changing so, so quickly.

And he calls us all out on its focus on material goods, on its worship of technology, how we're overloaded with information, and how ultimately, how lonely we all are.

We're living in an age where we're obsessed with finding and discovering our deepest desires, whatever that means, believing that fulfilling them is the main thing you're supposed to do in this life.

Believing that fulfilling them is going to give us the most joy and a sense of identity. But Jesus' call couldn't be further from that way of thinking.

The King's call says, you're never going to find out who you really are by trying to find out who you really are. If you try to look for yourself, in the long run, you'll only find loneliness and desperation.

[12:13] You're going to have to lose yourself in following and serving me. You need me in your life to be truly who you were created to be.

We've seen how Matthew focuses on Jesus' authority as the Son of God and the disciples' response to that. But Peter and Andrew's personal response of Jesus is really only a shadow of the true power and love that Jesus would show by growing to the cross.

Something they had absolutely no idea of at the time. And we're all very lucky to be in a slightly different position to Peter. We know that Jesus' death is evidence that there is a God who is so good, who loves us so, so sacrificially, that he would be willing to die for us.

When we respond to this call, we're not responding to some guy who's sitting on a chair in the clouds, but to a living and a dynamic human being, a being.

To an infinite almighty being who poured himself out into a human being so that he could walk with us. And that human being who in turn poured his blood out on the cross so that we could be reunited with him.

[13:35] It's the love that Jesus shows through his death that gives us that confidence to step out and follow. So for those of us who don't know him yet, he invites us to do exactly the same thing that he invited for Peter and Andrew.

To come and follow him. But as we read on, we see that the core requires more than just a response.

The response has to come in the form of sacrificial obedience. We see this first with Peter and Andrew laying down their jobs, literally. They put down their nets to step out and follow Jesus.

But then we see even more clearly in the second set of brothers Jesus calls in verse 21. James and John. Not only were they fishermen, but they were literally standing in a boat working with their dad, Zebedee.

This time there's a family member and there's a family business in the picture. But at the same time, Jesus calls James and John to follow him.

[14:43] And immediately, at once, they leave their jobs and their father behind and followed him. So there's a sacrifice. But there's also an obedience.

They first had to sacrifice. They had to leave something behind. And that was their nets and their father. It wasn't just leaving behind their routines and their lifestyles, but completely cutting everything off.

Drawing a line in the sand. Coming to Jesus with empty hands. Maybe they were expected to keep the family business going. Maybe they had an amazing relationship with their dad.

But they had to give that up too. Because anything short of complete sacrifice wasn't enough. So then I asked, or we can all ask, why couldn't they have some time to think about it, right?

It's a pretty big commitment to just dive in and leave everything else behind, isn't it? But Jesus doesn't think so. He calls the fishermen in that way because it's the only way to do it.

[15:50] If they didn't understand that, then they don't get what it means to follow him. Why? Because staying in that old situation makes any form of discipleship impossible.

Jesus wasn't calling the disciples to accept some nice idea that he was a son of God. But his goal was to recreate their entire lives.

The only way to do this was to go along with Jesus for the ride, no matter how bumpy, how hard it was. And then, and only then, would James and John be in a position, in a place, where faith was possible.

When they go out of their circumstances, their believing circumstances, to a place where they can't believe, don't know the way forward, then that creates the space, makes room for Jesus to work, and for faith to be possible.

And Jesus says the same thing in Luke 9:62. No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. Anyone who plows a field needs to be focused on plowing completely.

[17:04] It's not about being more organized. It's not about being more committed or working harder at your plowing. The only way is to completely follow. But in that sacrifice, there's another aspect to it.

It has to come with an act of obedience. They didn't just throw their nets away and then stand at the shore. They followed him. They followed Jesus. There was no road map, no GPS, no concrete plan. They had absolutely zero, no idea what was going to happen the next day, or they were even going to sleep and eat. And when Jesus talks about discipleship and what it means to follow him, we see his response in Matthew 8 a little bit later on.

Then the teacher of the law came to him and said, Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go. Jesus replied, Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the son of man has no place to lay his head.

In other words, I see you have a home. I see you have a very nice standard of living. Are you willing to put that behind and me in front? Are you willing to lose those things for my sake?

[18:13] And the second part, I think, the king's call to sacrifice and obedience challenges those of us who have half a heart in this world and half a heart in Christ.

Regardless, the king's call is still the same. Come, follow me. Because in the end, there aren't two types of Christians. I'm sorry.

There aren't two types of Christians. There's not Christians who are disciples and regular Christians and people who are really disciples.

There's only one type of Christian, a Christian who is a disciple. But a lot of the times, though, we're very happy to play mental gymnastics with this command for complete obedience.

So let's say a father is talking to his five-year-old son, who coincidentally also happens to be called Ian. It's 10 o'clock at night, and it's way past Ian's bedtime.

[19:24] And then Ian, the father says, it's time for bed. Ian knows what he has to do. Ian knows what he has to do. But Ian is a child, and Ian likes playing mental gymnastics.

So Ian says to himself, well, dad is telling me to go to bed, but what he really means is that I'm tired. And he doesn't want me to be tired.

Right? So what won't make me tired? Going out to play won't make me tired. Right? So that means when dad tells me to go to bed, what he really means, what he actually wants to say to me is, Ian, go out and play.

Now, if little Ian then went out and played, what do you think would happen? He would be punished for his disobedience. Right? So Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a Christian writer in Nazi Germany who was hanged for his failed assassination of Hitler, he asks exactly the same question.

Why do we behave differently? Why do we play all these mental gymnastics when it comes to following Jesus' commands? He says that we try to argue ourselves out of total obedience all the time.

[20:36] When Jesus says, don't be anxious, we take him to mean, well, of course we should be planning ahead of ourselves at least some of the time, otherwise we won't be responsible Christians. Right?

When Jesus says, seek first the kingdom of God, we take him to mean, of course we should seek other things first, like food and shelter and a good education.

Otherwise, how am I going to have the energy to do things for God? What he really means is to make sure I'm prepared to put everything on the line when he tells me to. And all the time, time and time again, we are simply trying to escape from single-minded obedience.

And all of the time we think single-minded obedience is hard, but it's actually both harder and easier, as C.S. Lewis would say. In Luke 9:23, Jesus says that if anyone is to follow him, we must

take up our cross daily.

In other words, to willingly choose to take up things that we know will be so intensely uncomfortable and even painful. Things that go beyond what we want as human beings.

[21 : 47] Taking up our cross is painful, and it has to be painful, because death and crucifixion is deeply painful. Otherwise, it wouldn't be death.

This is the hard, almost impossible thing. But that is far, far, far easier than what we try to do instead. When we are trying to stay ourselves, prioritize our own personal happiness, but also try to be good Christians, we let our hearts go their own way, but hope that we might become better disciples, Jesus said that's exactly what we can't do.

Because in the end, we either give up, or we become very grumpy people, who try to love themselves, love others, love God at the same time, but we fail miserably at both.

I think C.S. Lewis, in his book, Mere Christianity, puts it best. Christ says, give me all. I don't want so much of your time, and so much of your money, and so much of your work.

I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there.

[22 : 58] I want to have the whole tree down. Make no mistake. If you let me, I will make you perfect. I will never rest nor let you rest until you are literally perfect, until my Father can say without reservation that he is well-pleased with you, as he said he was well-pleased with me.

This I can do and will do, but I will not do anything less. But I will not do anything less.

So the king's invitation demands a response in sacrificial, single-minded obedience. Nothing more, but nothing less. And finally, as we come to this last part of the reading, we notice that it's cut away to a completely different scene.

Verses 23 and 25 describe Jesus' teaching and preaching and healing throughout Galilee. It might not look like it, but Jesus is also calling this time in a different, maybe even more intimate way.

And that's our third observation. The king's core demands intimacy, a loving relationship with him. If we look at verse 25, Jesus was teaching in the synagogues.

[24 : 21] He was explaining the truth to Jewish leaders who were perhaps already familiar with the scriptures, drawing out everything that points to him as the Messiah. He was proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, teaching the truth to maybe those on the countryside or people who didn't know who he was initially.

And Jesus was healing in 25 and 26. The good news of the kingdom wasn't only lip service, but it was taught and it was preached, but also authenticated, shown through concrete evidence of his healing of disease and sickness.

So his healing showed that not only he was the real deal, that he was a healer, but it's so much bigger. It showed that he had authority over the powers of the world, over all realms of human life, physical, emotional, spiritual.

And especially that his kingdom, the kingdom of God, had finally arrived. So we see how intimate and people-centered Jesus' ministry was.

Wherever he traveled, whatever the setting, Jesus was relevant and found people exactly where they were in life. And we see in verse 25 that this all attracted people from all over the place, right?

[25 : 36] So the Galilee region probably had about 300,000 people there at the time. But we see in verse 25 that people came from all over. The Roman region of Decapolis to the south and to the east.

The Jewish regions of Jerusalem and Judea, and even those beyond the Jordan to the north and to the east. So Jesus' public ministry caused a massive stir.

But one thing that I thought was quite interesting to note is that verse 25, if you have a look, is the third time that the word follow comes up.

So we have the calling of the two fishermen, firstly. The two instances of follow. And the third time is in verse 25. So large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed him.

The large crowds seemed to make us think that Jesus would be a superstar with a lot of fans, leader of a massive ministry later on. Many of us know also that this was not the case.

[26 : 40] We also know that it was the crowds at Jesus' trial who asked for the murderer Barabbas to be released. It was the crowds who shouted, Crucify him, crucify him.

And when we read on in the very next verse, chapter 5, verse 1, we see that Jesus labels the two types of followers differently. We see that there are crowds who Jesus saw, who followed him around, but then there were disciples who came to him.

We might be called to ask questions about these labels that Matthew has, those who walk intimately with Jesus, versus those who follow him from a very far away, happy with all the blessings and physical benefits that he brings, but never truly knowing who he was.

So finally, the king's invitation is not only a call to respond, to sacrifice, to obey, but to enter into an intimate, loving relationship with him.

It speaks to those of us who have forgotten our first love for Christ, to those of us who have become jaded, spiritually dull, or simply tired.

[27 : 56] The message and the call doesn't change. It's still come. Follow me. In the same way we have put the crowds under a magnifying glass, we should turn the magnifying glass back on ourselves.

We evaluate the motives that we have for following Christ. Is it because of weekly habit? Things that I hear other people are saying.

The miracles and blessings in my life that Jesus brings. Jesus' ministry is very intimate. He teaches and preaches and heals. But most importantly, he calls us to journey alongside him, not just as one of the many faces in the crowd, but on a deeply personal level, to know him and to let ourselves be known by him.

As I was preparing to speak with you all today, I was actually personally challenged by this final point the most.

So it made me reflect on all the times where I've felt spiritually dull or empty, where the accusation in the first letter to the Ephesus church in Revelation 2 comes to mind.

[29 : 15] But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. That, Ian, you've forgotten how much you used to love me, says Jesus.

That church in Ephesus looked so good on paper. They stood against evil. They suffered for the name of Christ. They worked hard. But they were able to put up with a lukewarm, half-hearted love for Jesus.

And so as I was reflecting, those times walking in dark valleys came to mind, where my first love and joy of knowing God, the passion and the fire seemed to grow so cold that it was just a distant memory.

And those times I remember that doubt so easily creeps in. Was I just imagining how good things were before? How did I get to where I am now?

And then for those of you who might share a similar personality to me, I start by promising God that I'll do better next time, hiding behind my dirty rags of good deeds.

[30 : 25] I promise him that I'll spend more time with him every day. And finally, I try to wrangle and bend my own will to obey, to force myself and force my desires to love God.

But time and time and again, Jesus has called me to refocus on him. Nothing more than simply come. Follow me. I'm learning that my identity and desires can only be changed by a profound experience of grace.

It's so, so much easier for me to decide in my mind, yes, I should probably return to Jesus. Yes, I should love him intimately and follow him as a disciple.

But you can't change desires by deciding to change desires. That's not true transformation. That's just acting. The heart is in an iPhone that you can just reprogram by installing an app.

No, the only way is to be motivated and transformed by an experience of that first love. It's about shifting the focus of our desires, and we become so melted by the amazing sight and knowledge and sense of Jesus that we can do nothing but repent and run into the arms of the Savior.

[31 : 49] And so all of this is bundled up in three simple words. Come, follow me. For those of us who are returning to our first love, he doesn't call us to make up for lost time.

His grace doesn't measure how far we've strayed. And sometimes we've strayed very far. The door isn't locked. The play hasn't finished yet.

It's never too late. We can have that sweet, sweet relationship with Jesus once again. So commit yourself to following him. Walk beside him.

Tell him you've grown cold. Tell him you've been unfaithful. He will walk alongside you, ready to forgive, and ready to show you his beautiful love once again.

The King's invitation and conclusion, come, follow me, speaks to all of us, no matter where we are in our journey with him. He calls us to respond, to sacrifice and forsake our comfort, to obey, and to come into a loving relationship with him.

[33 : 00] Whether we have yet to know who he is, whether we need to reflect on our half-hearted obedience, or whether we've known him for a while and have just lost our passion and our first love, Jesus' invitation to follow doesn't change.

And I just want to end with this quote from C.S. Lewis again. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life, and you will save it.

Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day, and death of your whole body in the end. Submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life.

Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead.

Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ, and you will find him, and with him, everything else.

[34 : 09] Let's pray.