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Sermon Notes

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## **Fishers of Men**

**Mark 1:17**

Last week, we walked over these verses quickly.

This week, I want to zero in on this one statement by Christ:

*“Come, follow me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.”*

Our context: FBC Durham is a healthy church... we are all delighted to be here, to enjoy the health of this church, to enjoy the spiritual vitality in other church members, the sweet fellowship, the excellent music, the ministry of the Word.

But friends, we are surrounded by people who are perishing in their sin. Jesus does not want us to be complacent, to be satisfied with all our health and resources. He wants us to become fishers of men as well. This is the greatest need of our church, the greatest need of the hour. If we step up in humility and allow him to do a work in us by his Spirit, we can see a vast harvest of souls. But if we stay comfortable and satisfied within the walls of this church while lost people hurry further and further down the road to destruction, we will have to answer for it on Judgment Day.

So, I take this passage as a direct message from the Holy Spirit to us to move us, provoke us, challenge us, equip us to become fishers of men... to evangelize the lost and bring them to a saving faith in Christ.

First, a clear caveat: I am not into fishing at all... I have never enjoyed either the process or the product. But I know that there are among you some excellent fishermen. Some of you have been out on the open sea doing big-game fishing. Maybe you have landed a blue marlin or a mighty swordfish or a yellowfin tuna. Or perhaps you're into freshwater fishing... going out in one of the nearby lakes in a low sleek motorboat early in the morning to land some largemouth bass. Or maybe you love fly fishing, standing in some waders in a peaceful mountain stream fishing for trout... angling with a skillfully tied fly and flicking your wrist back and forth to imitate the erratic motions of a flying insect, landing the line with grace and delicacy on the surface of the water, luring the trout to strike, landing the fish. I admire all of you... but honestly, I know nothing about it.

The fishermen Jesus was summoning to help build his kingdom used mostly weighted nets designed to encircle the fish in the Sea of Galilee and sink down toward the bottom, nets which one of their team would then swim down and close by hand, thus trapping the fish.

Jesus speaks by way of a parable, inviting them to enter his training school for a different kind of fishing. Through these words, Jesus is also calling on all of us to enter that same school... that we ourselves would become fishers of men.

This is the Great Commission Jesus gave to all of us in each of the four Gospels and the Book of Acts... to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth, to make disciples of all nations, to join him in seeking and saving the lost. This was his final command to his people before he ascended up to heaven. It is the central work we are to do while we live.

How, then, can we learn to become fishers of men?

I. First, Follow Christ

A. "Follow Me"

***ESV Mark 1:17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."***

1. Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee
2. Simon and his brother Andrew were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen
3. Jesus commanded them to leave everything and follow him
4. Essential to their training as fishers of men was first to BE WITH HIM, to walk with him
5. Their training would be first and foremost by example

Everything we will see Jesus do throughout the Gospel of Mark will help us and prepare us to be what he also was, a fisher of men. All of Jesus' healings showed his overwhelming compassion for the miseries of our sinful human race. All of Jesus' teachings we focused on the salvation of souls from sin. All of Jesus' encounters give us some pattern to follow... he is our role model in saving souls, our mentor in saving souls, our teacher and coach and trainer in saving souls... he is the general who leads from the front in saving souls... he is the shepherd who leads his sheep to face the wolves... "I am sending you out as sheep among wolves" and he is no hired hand, but went out boldly to meet the wolves on behalf of the sheep... FOLLOW ME and I will make you fishers of me... this is a comprehensive lesson from all of this Gospel of Mark... not just today

6. ***"I will make you to become..."*** The words imply a training program... they would become something they were not
7. They had to realize first and foremost their own deficiencies in being fishers of men

Clear example: John 4, the Samaritan woman

The Jewish disciples were almost certainly stunned that Jesus would choose to walk through such a polluted land with spiritually corrupted people

While they went into the village to buy food, Jesus had his evangelistic conversation with the woman at the well

He was a pure fisher of men... in this case, a fisher of a woman

He asked her for a drink; she was surprised he even spoke to her; he then reeled her in with one of the most fascinating statements he ever made; I call it a lure with four hooks on it:

***John 4:10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."***

One of the basic lessons in being a fisher of men is to have fruitful, fascinating, spiritual conversations with lost people... draw them in with interesting statements

Four hooks that made her come back to talk to him:

1) what is the "gift of God"?; 2) who are you... the one who is talking to me? What's so special about you? 3) Why should I ask you for anything? You have nothing with you at all... what do you really have to offer? 4) What is "living water?"

She will effectively ask him all four questions. By the time he is done with her, she is convinced he is the Messiah, the Promised One of God

But here's my point... while the woman leaves her water jar forgotten by the well and hurries in to the town and persuades all of the Samaritan people to come out to meet Jesus, the disciples had achieved NOTHING of spiritual consequence in that town!

They had simply completed their menial task of buying food.

When they returned with the physical food, Jesus challenged their spiritual blindness:

***John 4:32-35 "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." <sup>33</sup> Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him***

*food?" 34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.*

Jesus is using a different metaphor there... one of a spiritual farmer bringing in a harvest... but it really is fishing for men

BUT they had done NOTHING toward that end... their eyes were blind to the true work; they were not fishers of men

Jesus had to MAKE THEM BECOME fishers of men

8. So it is with us

- a. We need to be humble and honest about our evangelistic record
- b. We need to come and confess that, just like the disciples, we seem to know nothing about Jesus' food... to do the will of God in rescuing sinners, pulling them in with spiritual nets
- c. Follow me, Jesus said, and **I will make you something you're not...** evangelistically active, evangelistically skillful, evangelistically fruitful... a fisher of men

B. BUT FIRST: Be Certain Christ Has Landed You

1. We need to be sure we are disciples of Christ ourselves, following Christ daily by faith
2. So make certain you are spiritually alive... that you yourself have trusted in Christ as your Lord and Savior, that you have repented of your sins, that you have the gift of the indwelling Spirit
3. Then and only then can Christ make you to become a fisher of men

C. Imitation of Christ's Passion for Souls

1. Once we ourselves are following Christ as his disciples, if we are going to be fishers of men, we need to ask him to give us the same passion for souls that he had

2. We've already seen how single-minded he was to win the Samaritan woman to faith... winning her was like eating food the Father had given him
3. That same passionate SEEKING was in his mind with Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector... he had climbed up a Sycamore Fig tree

***Luke 19:5-6 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." <sup>6</sup> So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.***

When Jesus had LANDED Zacchaeus through repentance and faith, and Zacchaeus had pledged to repay all the people he'd defrauded four-fold, Jesus celebrated:

***Luke 19:9-10 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house.... <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."***

4. What about US? Do we feel that same passion for the lost? To seek and to save lost people around us?
5. We cannot be fishers of men without that single-minded focus to SEEK and to SAVE the lost
6. I truly believe the central lack in our hearts in this matter is a lack of genuine love for lost people, of a yearning to fish them into the Kingdom, a genuine grief over their lostness
7. Naturally, apart from Christ, we don't really care that sin is ruining their lives, their marriages, their parenting, their hearts and minds... their grief and their emptiness and their addictive behaviors don't mean too much to us
8. Only as we FOLLOW CHRIST can we become fishers of men

## II. Fish Who Delight to be Caught

### A. All Parables Have Limitations

1. So it is with this metaphor of being a fisher of men

### B. Ordinarily Disastrous for the Fish

1. The fish is snagged by the baited hook, dragged on board after a fight, clubbed senseless, then gutted and eaten

C. However... the Fish We Will Be Catching Are Actually Being LIBERATED from Hidden Nets

1. Satan has ensnared them in the invisible spiritual nets of sin... addicted to passions and pleasures and worldly idols, they are sinking down... weighed down by wickedness
2. The gospel actually is SETTING PEOPLE FREE from these invisible traps and nets by which Satan is destroying them

D. These Fish Will Spend Eternity Delighted to Have Been Caught!

### III. Basic Fishing Technique

#### A. Definition of Evangelism

1. The word “evangelize” comes from the Greek word “euangelion” which means GOOD NEWS... to proclaim the good news of God
2. In order to understand true, biblical evangelism, we need to understand the gospel: GOD-MAN-CHRIST-RESPONSE
  - a. God: God is the creator of all things, therefore he is the ruler, the lawgiver, and the judge
    - i) Central to God’s rule are his laws... the Ten Commandments, and the Two Commandments
  - b. Man
    - i) Created by God to have a love relationship with God, but also to serve God the King
    - ii) We rebelled against God’s laws and stand under his just condemnation... the wages of sin is death
  - c. Christ
    - i) fully God, fully man... Lived a sinless life... did great signs and wonders

ii) Died in our place on the cross; our guilt was transferred to Christ and he died; his righteousness transferred to us and we live forever

iii) God raised him to life on the third day!!!

d. Response:

***Mark 1:15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"***

Evangelism is the proclamation of that message to lost sinners for their salvation

B. Our Limits... and What God Alone Can Do

1. Fishers of men have a role to play; but that role is limited by what we can and cannot do
2. The fish is landed into the Kingdom when it is BORN AGAIN through faith in Christ
3. That new birth is something only THE HOLY SPIRIT can do

IV. Fishing Equipment

A. Common to All Fishing Tackle: Force

1. All fishing techniques involve force... moving the fish from the water to land
2. This is true of big-game fishing in which a rod is used and very high-tension fishing line to land the marlin or the sailfish; the hook is baited, the fish strikes, the line reels it in after an hour struggle
3. This is true of trawler nets that draw through the water and catch everything in a vicinity... FORCEFULLY landing the fish
4. So also fishing for men spiritually should be seen as a work of spiritual FORCE by God through the Holy Spirit

B. Central Text:



***John 6:44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.***

The word Jesus uses here... "draws" is a forceful word... used for the drawing of a dragnet through the water or of a sword out of a scabbard

No one can come to Christ alone, unaided, on his or her own... God the Father is DRAWING that person forcefully, drawing him to Christ... he is "coming to Christ" ... it is not a geographical journey, but a spiritual one... moving mentally and spiritually from lostness to faith in Christ

Though this doctrine is commonly called "irresistible grace," that is misleading... the sinner is never brought to Christ against his or her will... but rather under forceful compulsions, they change their minds and hearts about Christ and come willingly

But it is still forceful... I prefer the term "effectual calling" .... God is able to draw a sinner effectively, forcefully

Now, what kind of forces are on a sinner who comes to Christ? And how can we, as fishers of men, apply these forces to their souls?

Four NETS by which we DRAW THEIR SOULS INTO Christ's Kingdom; or FISHING LINES if you prefer

The net of truth... the net of love... the net of fear... the net of delight

These are some of the main forces the Holy Spirit uses through an evangelist to bring souls to Christ

#### C. Drawn by the Net of Truth

1. The truth of the gospel is forceful
2. The evangelist's primary task is to share the scriptures, for the scriptures have converting power

***Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes***

3. Stephen's powerful reasoning from scripture was very difficult to refute

***Acts 6:9-10 These men began to argue with Stephen, <sup>10</sup> but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.***

4. So also Paul as he went consistently into the synagogue with careful argumentation from scripture

***Acts 17:2-3 Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.***

The fruit was immediate:

***Acts 17:4 Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.***

5. So also the convicting power of the Word of God on Pentecost:

***Acts 2:37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"***

6. The powerful truth of God's Word puts a relentless force on the mind of the unconverted person, pulling toward faith in Christ
7. The scriptures can stick deeply in someone's mind long after they should have forgotten them

Luke Short was a healthy hundred-year-old farmer in colonial New England, perhaps around the year 1770, who had not yet trusted Christ. Sitting in a field thinking about his long life, his mind went back to his boyhood years in Dartmouth, England, before he sailed for America. At the age of fifteen, he heard a sermon preached by John Flavel on the text "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be [accursed]! Come Lord Jesus!" (1 Cor. 16:22 KJV). Flavel focused on the horror of dying under God's curse. Eighty-five years later, Luke Short remembered Flavel's sermon as he sat under a tree and came to faith in Christ! THE FORCE OF TRUTH

#### D. Drawn by the Net of Love

1. Christian love is a powerful apologetic for the gospel...
2. This world is vicious and selfish... people are filled with hate for each other

***Titus 3:3-5 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. <sup>4</sup> But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us!!***

3. The KINDNESS and LOVE of God our Savior appeared... in the person of Christ

God's kindness has great converting power... but now, it is often mediated through his human messengers

4. The cords of human kindness

***Hosea 11:4 I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love***

- a. The "cords of human kindness"
- b. There is a tremendous force to people being sacrificially loving and gently kind
- c. Those cords may be a gentle nature, or a pattern of sacrificial giving and service to the needy, or a surprising forgiveness

When Stephen died in Acts 7, he did so lovingly, saying "**Lord, do not hold this sin against them.**" Saul of Tarsus saw how he died and was most certainly convicted by his gracious manner, though it did not immediately convert him

5. Two aspects of the power of Christian love

- a. First, love we show to one another

***John 13:35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.***

AD 200 Tertullian wrote about the impact Christians were having in the Roman Empire. **“Behold, how they love one another!”**

b. Second, love we show to the lost person

Christians have led the way for two thousand years in benevolent ministry to the poor and needy, to the suffering and wretched... from the early Christians picking up babies the Romans left to die under the bridges to the orphanages established by George Mueller to the stunning sacrificial love shown by William and Catherine Booth to the poorest of London in the early days of the Salvation Army... Christians have displayed the sacrificial love of Christ... and those displays have led to the conversions of many

E. Drawn by the Net of Fear

1. John Newton’s *Amazing Grace*

“Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved”

2. Conviction of sin causes some to awake to the terrors of hell

3. No one warned more about hell than did Jesus

***Matthew 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.***

***Luke 12:5 Yes, I tell you, fear him.***

4. In June of 1741, in Enfield Connecticut, Jonathan Edwards’s famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” was so clear about the infinite and eternal dangers of hell that people were convinced that there was a very real possibility that they would instantly be consumed that very day

By the end of the sermon, the congregation was moaning and crying out saying “What shall I do to be saved?”

5. The evangelist must make the lost person feel acutely the conviction of personal sin and the danger of hell... this is the Holy Sprit's task, for he alone can convict of sin, but the evangelist must search the person's heart with the law of God to show the peril they are in

In Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the allegory of the Christian life, the main character, Christian, becomes convinced by reading in the Bible that he lives in the City of Destruction that will soon be consumed by the wrath of God. He knows he must flee the wrath to come, and starts on his pilgrimage

#### F. Drawn by the Net of Delight

1. But, in *Pilgrim's Progress*, where does Christian want to go? To the Celestial City... a place of perfect joy and pleasure and beauty... he describes it to his neighbor:

There is an endless kingdom to be enjoyed, and everlasting life to be given us, that we may live in that kingdom forever. There are crowns of glory to be given us, and garments that will make us shine like the sun in the sky. There shall be no more crying, nor sorrow; for he that is owner of the place will wipe all tears from our eyes.

2. The net of beauty and delight and hope and pleasure pulls the sinner finally to Christ...
3. Christ is the treasure hidden in the field... he is willing to sell everything that he may obtain that beautiful treasure!!
4. In the end, delight draws the sinner... pure delight... a sense of the perfect beauty of Christ and of heaven and a yearning to have them

Bunyan himself was converted in part by overhearing the conversation of a group of women who were Christians, and they did not know he was listening. But these Christian women were speaking with transporting power of the delights of heaven:

“I thought they spoke as if joy did make them speak; they spoke with such pleasantness of Scripture language and with such appearance

of grace in all they said, that they were to me as if they had found a new world....”

So, these are four powerful nets God uses to draw sinners to faith in Christ... there are others, but these are your main tackle to be fishers of men: the net of **truth**, the net of **love**, the net of **fear**, and the net of **delight**.

## V. Finding the Fish

### A. Fishing Techniques and Tackle are No Guarantee of Success

The most experienced fisherman knows the truth of this statement! You can have the best equipment, including a sonar device to probe the hidden reaches of the deep, you can have the sleekest boat and the top of the line tackle, you can be in the best waters you know where in the past the fish have teemed... you can have the most experience and the best skill... and still you can labor for hours and catch nothing

Peter had that experience twice:

***Luke 5:5 “we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything.***

***John 21:3 they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.***

### B. Jesus Knows Where the Fish Are

1. Both times, Jesus told them where to fish
2. Both times, they caught a stunning number of fish... so many, their nets were beginning to break and their boats were sinking under the weight of the fish!!!!

### C. Jesus Has Power to Turn the Fish

1. I have no idea how this miracle worked except that Jesus has power over the direction of the fish
2. He supernaturally caused them to move to a certain location and swim in a certain direction so they would be caught

So throughout church history, we have stories of amazing providences, of individuals who went exactly where there were people ready to be saved:

***Acts 8:26-27 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road-- the desert road-- that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch***

#### D. Single-minded Devotion to Fishing

***Acts 20:24 I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.***

George Whitefield: "God forbid that I should travel with anyone for a quarter of an hour without speaking of Christ to them."

DL Moody made a commitment never to go to bed without having at least once shared the gospel with someone that day.

## VI. A Direct and Urgent Appeal

### A. Christ is Calling on FBC to Become Fishers of Men

### B. Our Immediate Opportunity:

We are surrounded daily by lost people... they are pouring into this Triangle region in record numbers; officials expect Durham's population to double in the next 25 years; most of them are unchurched... lost... dead in their transgressions and sins

It is up to us to draw them into the Kingdom by the power of the Spirit

### C. Prayer

***Acts 1:8 you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."***

Begin with four prayer meetings asking for God's power to be witnesses... four consecutive Wednesday nights from 6:30 to 7:30, starting February 23, through March 16