

Matthew 19-04-28b

Beautiful contribution in music there by our faithful and talented instrumentalists, always enjoy those, and Whiter Than Snow is a wonderful reminder of the theme that we find here in our passage as we resume our study in Matthew chapter 4 and the idea here is that the Lord Jesus was introduced as one who would make a distinction and make a separation and the result after that sorting and that separation is going to be judgment. There is judgment of worth and value and there is judgment of condemnation and destruction. How did John the Baptist introduce the Lord Jesus? What did he have in his hand? His winnowing fan is in his hand.

John the Baptist preached to these very same men that the mission of the coming Messiah would be to first winnow the wheat from the chaff. He will gather the wheat into his barn and what's going to happen to the chaff? Burned with unquenchable fire. Burned with unquenchable fire.

They're not unquenchable pieces of chaff. The fire is unquenchable. The fire is unstoppable.

The judgment is immutable and irresistible. There may not be irresistible grace but there is certainly irresistible judgment and that is the business about which the father sent the son. I must be about my father's business and it is to make the issue clear in a final crystallized presentation that will out those who love the light and are drawn to the light and those who love darkness rather than light.

A light has shined in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. It's beginning at Nazareth and Capernaum. What happened in Nazareth? We saw this in our review last time of the events when Jesus preached in Nazareth.

Is not this the carpenter's son? Who's this guy? They were amazed at his teaching. They were dazzled by his proficiency with scripture but their bedazzlement quickly turned to resistance, hate, and murderous intent. They want to throw him off the brow of the hill.

That's Nazareth. That's Zebulun. What will happen in Capernaum? Well, he's in Capernaum now.

So, as we've seen in our first session this morning, this fishing for men does have an upside. There is that element that we've always associated with that figure that there are those who can be, for example, netted out of the troubled sea, rescued from being embroiled in what has always been pictured as the realm of evil and the denizens of the deep behemoth and Leviathan and so on. There could be some element there.

We read that into it. You don't find that in scripture. There is no positive image of fishing men in scripture unless you read it into this one.

I will make you fishers of men. Well, the Lord Jesus did come to gather the wheat into the barn. And you could argue, well, isn't that wheat going to be ground and roasted and turned into bread? But it is useful to the master's purpose.

It is productive. It is benefit. It is viewed as a blessing.

And in that sense, fishing and bringing in those who are going to be beneficial to the father's purpose can be seen in this. It's not universally negative. And we saw this in Matthew 13, that there is a discrimination.

You'll remember that there's going to be another episode toward the end of Jesus' time on earth that will reflect this. But before we look at that, I mentioned at the beginning this morning that Matthew is still compressing the account. Not everything that happened is included here.

Let's look first at what is included. To whom does Jesus say, follow me and I will make you fishers of men? How many disciples are under this promise? Two. Only two.

He sees Simon called Peter. Notice, Simon already called Peter. He's already renamed him.

Simon called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea. Follow me and I will make you fishers of men. They left their nets and followed him.

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. He called them. And immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

There's no indication that Jesus repeated the words found in verse 19. He only says it to Peter and Andrew. Now, what is the difference in the situation of Peter and Andrew and James and John? What are Peter and Andrew doing? Casting their nets and actively fishing.

Jesus says follow me and you'll have a new target. What are James and John doing? They are not fishing. What are they doing? It's an associated task, but they're not fishing.

They are mending their nets. And who else is with them? I think this is a case of ageism. Don't you? It's ageism.

It's ageist. Zebedee, the father, is sitting in the boat. Why didn't Jesus say, come on, Zeb, you're not too old.

Come on, follow me. Who gets left behind when James and John drop the mending, darning needles and so on, their re-weaving of these nets to follow Jesus? Who gets stuck holding the net? Zebedee, right? Do you not think Zebedee is a man of faith and a godly, active believer to have raised two sons like James and John and for them to, as

adult men, be willingly serving in the family business and being one with Him? Notice how many times Zebedee is honored in Scripture by having his name mentioned. Who's the father of James the Less? Who's the father of Philip or Nathaniel, Bartolomeo? Who's the father of the other Judas? But who is always mentioned when you're talking about James and John, just nearly always? Zebedee.

Why? Because God likes to call his name. He was a good guy. There is a commonly observed principle here, and it doesn't mean that it's bad just because it's commonly observed.

But when Jesus uses the metaphor to Peter and Andrew and says, follow me and I will make you fishers of men, He doesn't say this to Matthew the tax collector. He doesn't say it to zealots or men in other professions, whatever other walk of life the other eight disciples might have been in, does He? He says, I will make you fishers of men to the two men who are actively engaged in fishing. And it has been often observed that God uses us as we are and with what we're good at and invests those skills and experiences and talents with new purpose.

You could imagine, perhaps, it isn't in Scripture and it's a bit of a stretch, but you could imagine Jesus saying to Matthew, follow me and I will make you a collector of men. Collecting taxes, you'll collect men. Tax is a portion of the total money available.

You'll be collecting a portion of the men that are available. If Luke had been a disciple, which many people sort of unconsciously assume that he was, but he wasn't, but we happen to know that his profession was a doctor. And you could imagine in a case like that, a hypothetical like that, that Jesus might say, follow me and you will be a healer of souls instead of a healer of bodies.

But to repurpose a perspective and a set of skills and knowledge and experience in a new way is a legitimate observation to make here. Jesus uses a fishing analogy, a fishing illustration to men who understand fishing since they were old enough to crawl into the boat, right? And it is perfectly true that as we pursue our spiritual life, God is going to use our peculiar combination of heredity and environment and experience and knowledge and strengths and weakness for new and higher and eternal purposes. Nothing wrong with seeing that here.

He is talking to fishermen and says, I can invest your fishing skills with a higher and greater purpose. I think that is completely legitimate and a useful application. We don't have to become something we are not.

Four of the twelve disciples were fishermen. Jesus tells half of those fishermen, I will make you fishers of men. The other thing that is not quite so commonly observed but is important here is there is an option.

They don't have to become fishers of men. What is the condition to become a fisher of men? Jesus says, I will make you fishers of men on what condition? What is the potential? Follow me. Do they know what is involved in following? We know from the other gospels, they have been with Jesus for weeks and months.

They have seen him in a number of different contexts. They have seen him in Cana, they have seen him in Jerusalem, they have seen him in Nazareth. They know the risk of the hatred of people from seeing what happened in Nazareth.

They have certainly heard about this even if they weren't all present. So before a man sets out on a course of action, let him count the cost. Follow me and you are going to be doing something similar but different.

But it is contingent on following. Many times people get all excited about the evangelistic side of Christianity which is legitimate and necessary. None of us would be believers if we hadn't been evangelized by somebody.

But what has to precede that? Even if you say, well, but the net. Notice the fishermen make their own nets and mend their nets. You can think of this, if you want to push the metaphor a little bit, who crafts the individual message that an evangelist or a pastor or a teacher presents? Well, the fisherman makes his nets and mends his nets, tries to do the best job he can of casting a net that is going to accomplish the purpose of the net which is to draw to the place of accountability and the place of judgment.

Make people aware. You're either going to be good or bad. You're either going to be wheat or chaff.

You're either going to be a tree that bears fruit or you're going to be a tree that the axe is laid at the root of. Awareness. And this portion of it is the manufacture done by the people skilled to do that.

And there are some people who have been gifted, granted, given opportunity by whatever means to know how to make a net and how to cast it effectively and how to use it. But that in and of itself is not enough. And this is what we find in the parallel passage.

Turn with me to Luke chapter 5. I mentioned that this is a compressed account. Luke gives us some detail that Matthew omits. Begin at 4.42 of Luke.

When it was day, he departed and went to a deserted place. The crowd sought him and came to him, tried to keep him from leaving them, but he said, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent. My purpose is to preach.

What was the basis of judgment that we saw in Jeremiah and in Amos and in Habakkuk?

Does this people listen to the word of the Lord or not? Jesus has to preach, not because the more preaching you hear, the more growth you attain. He is preaching to shine the light. He is preaching to out the good and bad fish, the wheat and the chaff, the fruitful tree and the fruitless tree.

Are you a tree planted by the rivers of water bringing forth your fruit in your season, or are you a tumbleweed? The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff with which the wind driveth away. Not going to be found in the assembly of the righteous. Psalm 1. I must preach elsewhere.

And he was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee. Chapter 5. So it was as the multitude pressed about him to hear the word of God. Notice, the multitude is there to hear the word of God.

It is one thing to hear it. It is something else to figure out what to do with it. Are you wax? Are you clay? Are you drawn? Or are you repelled? Are you transformed? Or are you hardened? The multitude pressed about him to hear the word of God.

He stood by the lake of Gennesaret. This is the Sea of Galilee. He saw two boats standing by the lake.

But the fishermen had gone from them and were washing nets. We had casting nets. We had mending nets.

Now we have washing nets. All fisherman duties. He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the hand.

And he sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. When he had stopped speaking, he said to Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch. Simon answered and said to him, Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing.

Nevertheless, at your word I will let down the net. Now this is a little bit of an appeal to one's own authority here. Simon says, you're a great rabbi.

I'm a fisherman. I've been fishing all night. Your words are great.

And at your word I'll let down the net. But you are talking to a professional fisherman here. It's just a little subtle hint of dubiousity.

A little bit of lack of confidence that Jesus knows what he's talking about. At your word I'll let down the net. I just want you to know, I, the professional commercial fisherman, have been here all night.

There are no fish out there. But you say let it down, I'll let it down. And there is compliance.

And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. Who are their partners in the other boat? James, John, Zebedee, and the other servants.

And they came and filled both of the boats so that they began to sink. The nets are breaking, and the boat is about to sink. The fishermen are about to join the fish back in the sea.

The net can't contain them. The boat can't hold them. There are so many.

I can't tell you how many countless numbers of sermons have been preached about, if you'll only do a revival right, the hordes that will come to faith in Christ will break the nets and sink the boats. That's not what is being said here. Not even close.

What is the breaking of a net, and what is the sinking of a boat? Is this a good thing? This is not a good thing. Your net breaking is not good. Your boat sinking is not good.

If you're a fisherman, you don't want broken nets. That's why John and James and Matthew are mending the nets. Broken nets are not good.

And you say, well, it's just to talk about the impressiveness of the catch. A really impressive catch would be just right. It would exactly fill the boat.

There would be no baskets of fragments left over at the feeding of the 5,000. There would be no baskets of fragments left over at the feeding of the 4,000. There is so much that is in need of judgment in Israel that the agents of judgment are insufficient to even bring it about.

That's what's going on here. How do you know the net is broken? What's happening if the net is broken? Fish are falling back out into the sea. If you're trying to keep the boat from sinking, what are you doing with the fish? What did the sailors do when the storm was threatening to sink the Jonah boat? They cast everything over the boat side and eventually cast Jonah out.

You've got to lighten the ship to keep from sinking. It's not worth losing your boat. What are you going to do with the catch of fish? Are you going to walk the boat across the bottom of the lake all the way to the shore? This is not good.

It's miraculous, and it definitely proves that Jesus knows where the fish are. But why are you netting the fish? And if you are incapable of accomplishing the mission because the nets are insufficient and the boats are insufficient, you can ooh and aah at how many there are, but think a ply deeper if you're a chess player. Look another move ahead.

What's going on here? There is not enough judgment available to do the judgment that is needed in Israel. Pray the Lord of the harvest that He can send workers into the field.

The fields are white for harvest.

What happens after the harvest? Everybody says, oh, look at all that wheat. Just go out and gather it. What happens after the harvest? Pray the Lord of the harvest that He will send workers into the field.

Why? Think a step further. What happens after the harvest? Threshing, winnowing, burning of chaff. Everything out there that's white for harvest isn't going into the barn.

Judgment, separation, discrimination. And you ask yourself, when the Lord looks at my life, where's the wheat and where's the chaff? Am I so enamored with the positive side of things that I'm oblivious and blind to the principle of separation and discrimination and judgment? Am I so happy about how many fish there are that I ignore the fact that the net's broken and the boats are sinking and the fish are getting away? A perfect catch would have exactly filled the net and been just enough for the fishermen to bring in, level to the gunnels of the boats. They bring them in and the crowd on the shore that Jesus has been teaching all partake of the fish.

Jesus feeds the multitude with this abundance of fish that He had His disciples go out and get. Doesn't even talk about what happens to the fish. Read on.

They signaled to their partners, verse 7, come and help them. They came and filled both the boats so that they began to sink. Simon Peter saw it.

He fell down at Jesus' knees saying, Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord. Peter understands this. I'm a sinful man.

People say, Oh, he was just dazzled by the scope of the miracle. I think Peter, as a fisherman, understands what this means. There's a lot of sin in the camp.

There's a lot of sin in the nation. And there's a lot of sin in our souls. And Peter says, Lord, depart from me.

I should probably sink with this catch of fish and this boat. I'm unworthy to even be a fisherman anymore. For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken.

So also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, a good man, who were partners with Simon. Jesus said to Simon, Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.

Don't be afraid. From now on you will catch men. This is the identical same episode that we've just seen in Matthew chapter 4. Nothing about the miraculous catch.

Nothing about depart from me. And he says, I will make you, too, Peter and Andrew, fishers of men. And James and John, in the Matthew account, are mending nets.

Why are they mending the nets? They just broke. The nets broke here, pulling in the miraculous catch of fish. Jesus says here, From now on you will catch men.

Some time later, after they've emptied the nets, they've gathered the fish, they've sorted the fish, they've put fish where fish go after you catch them and sort them, now James and John are mending these broken nets from the miraculous catch. That's why they're mending the nets. They broke.

The Bible tells us they broke. They've dragged the boats ashore. The first thing you have to do is sort the fish.

It's like shooting a deer. The first thing you've got to do is hang the thing and drain it. You can't let it go bad.

You know how spoilable fish are. Fish as a dish is. Fish as a plurality are very perishable.

You've got to deal with them first. What do you do? You ice them. You salt them.

You sort them and get them in a place where they can be cooked. You dry them in the sun. Whatever you're going to do, you chop them and gut them and fillet them.

They had dried fish that they could get it to keep, kind of like fish jerky. But they've got to do all of that. Then they can turn their attention.

So some time has passed. Matthew compresses all of this to make his point. I will make you fishers of men.

They abandoned the nets, these broken nets, because the nets they're going to use from now on to catch men are of a different kind and a different sort. When they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed him. These boats that are at the shore, they drag on up out of the way.

It is Mark that tells us that there were servants there as well with Zebedee. Mark 1.16. He walked by the Sea of Galilee. He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.

Jesus said, Follow me. I will make you become fishers of men. They immediately left their nets and followed him.

When he had gone a little farther from there, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who also were in the boat, mending their nets. Immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and went after him. You get that additional detail in Mark that they're not abandoning their father to work that he can't accomplish.

There are contract fishermen who can carry on this business with Zebedee. Well, what

do we draw from this? First of all, if God is going to accomplish his purpose in and through us, we have to be followers. There is a time to accompany the Lord, and there is a time to go back and do your job.

They've been with Jesus before. They were with him down at the Jordan. They were with him in Cana.

They were with him back down in Jerusalem. They've been with him back up in Nazareth. But when they are not with him, they are pursuing their normal work, their normal employment.

Now Jesus calls them as full-time disciples. The question becomes, to what extent do we see ourselves in what Jesus says to his disciples and what he does with his disciples? Can we take all of this to the bank and say, well, there's a point at which I'm going to be a full-time, they used to call it in the church I grew up in, full-time Christian service, FTCS, full-time Christian service, and you're a missionary, or you're a pastor, or you're a Bible college professor, or whatever. It is important to distinguish when what Jesus says and does with the disciples is unique to them and their peculiar inauguratory mission.

Yes, I've made that up. Inauguratory. It's an inauguration.

It is a beginning. And it is unique. In the same way that there was a miraculous deliverance from Egypt, in the same way that there were miracles at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and at the beginning of the church age, there are things that are a part of the inauguration that do not persist and do not pertain all the way down.

Just because the apostles could heal after the fashion of the Lord Jesus, physical maladies, doesn't mean that this is going to pertain all the way down. When Jesus says to Peter and Andrew, follow me and I will make you fishers of men, that ministry has continued all the way down to the present day in the record of the early church in Acts and in the epistles of Peter that are a part of the New Testament. You will notice that as we go forward in the gospel accounts, they do not immediately start casting a net and gathering men.

Jesus doesn't send them into the highways and byways and compel the crowds to come. The crowds come on their own to hear the word. And then they either respond or they reject.

There are those who are responsive and there are others who hear it. And like the synagogue in Nazareth don't like what they hear. The Pharisees are going to come and listen just as they came and listened to John down by the Jordan.

And then they are going to form a conclusion and they are going to reject and they are going to renounce and they are going to plot and scheme eventually to have Jesus killed. But they have heard his teaching. He has answered their questions.

He has given them signs. He has demonstrated his identity and his mission and he has showed them better than they themselves know what the Old Testament scriptures had to say. But they love darkness rather than light.

Their deeds are evil and it is exposed. These disciples, these apostles, you have the figure of Peter and Andrew put for all of the disciples. Jesus is going to train all of them for over three years and they are going to go to Israel, all of them.

James will die very early on but these twelve are sent to Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, Acts 1-8, until the end of the age. Their ministry is specifically and exclusively to Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. Sadly, this uttermost parts of the earth thing, while it is kind of true, it is not what Jesus was telling them.

Their mission is their own people. Just as Jesus was initially sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Who is the apostle of the Gentiles? The apostle Paul.

Eleven, actually twelve if you count the example of James whose martyrdom was a one for each tribe. One apostle sent to the Gentiles. The Gentiles are going to respond in droves and the Jews are going to resist Paul at every turn.

Fishers of men. Their ministry, twelve of them to that little patch of ground there, Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. There is going to be such rejection that within forty years it is going to be obliterated.

The temple we destroyed, Jerusalem, will be burned. The people will be scattered just as it was foretold in Jeremiah. Just as it was foretold in Habakkuk.

Just as it is foretold in Amos. Just as it is described in Ezekiel. And they will be hunted.

They will be judged. Their corpses are going to be dying uncelebrated. It is going to be a grisly death.

You saw the passage in Jeremiah. That's what's going to happen. And the fishers here of men are those who are in the spiritual sense going to identify those who put themselves in the judgment.

Fishers of men. Hunters of men. Ensnarers of men.

Haulers in for sorting. Wheat will be gathered in the barn. Chaff is going to be burned.

Well, some people are actively casting the net. Others are mending the nets. Others are washing the nets.

What does the net represent? We have the net mentioned in all three instances. The net breaks. The net is cast.

The net is mended. The net is washed. What does it signify? You can cast the net on one side of the boat.

Perfectly good net. Nothing wrong with it. It doesn't accomplish its purpose.

What did Jesus say? Follow me and you will be made fishers of men. Made to become fishers of men. And you will be effective.

What is it that Simon Peter has to do before he gets that miraculous draft of fish? He is following the Lord Jesus. He doesn't think it makes sense. It doesn't appeal to his experience and knowledge.

But he follows. He is obedient when it doesn't seem reasonable. And that is what produces the net full of fish.

But it is insufficient. And there is going to be other nets that will be cast and other fishers of men that are going to account and shine the light, operate the winnowing fan, operate the axe that is laid at the root of the trees for judgment. But rather than a happy occasion of let's all merrily play the flute and dance a tune and pipe people into the kingdom, let's be fishers of men and we'll lure them and attract them and wonderful them into the kingdom, the communication of the truth creates responsibility.

And from those to whom much is given, much is required. We've been given much. What is the judgment going to reveal when it comes? I will make you fishers of men if you follow me.

It is a worthy calling, but it has a sorrowing side. The prophets of old, the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel with their messages offered both hope and warning. Hope and warning.

The word of God isn't a balm soothing the skin. It's not a tonic brightening the eyes and the hair and creating a rosy countenance. What does the Bible refer to itself as? A sword.

Jesus said, I've not come to bring peace, but a sword. And it will divide households into those who are going to be judged and those who are going to avail themselves of God's grace and God's salvation. That's what the communication of the word of God does.

The word of God has made an issue in every one of those Old Testament fishing passages. Do they listen to me or do they not? In the tribulation, when you see the abomination of desolation, flee. Are you going to heed it or not? Are you going to survive in the caves and holes in the mountains or not? It depends on what you do with the word of God.

Our success, our blessing, our reward, our opportunity is the great promise of service and function and reflection of God's glory if we respond to God's word, if we respond to

God's grace, if we cast ourselves on the rock of salvation. When the net of God's word scoops us up and the sorting takes place, where are we? When the wheat is being gathered into the barn, are we in that goodly number or are we headed for wood, hay, and stubble judgment on our lives? That's the great question. That's the message we have in our New Testament which comes to us from these men, Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartolomeo, Simon the Less, James the Less, Judas the Good One.

Those disciples disseminated the word of God. They went out by twos, six teams. They went out as the 70 and cast the net throughout Israel.

Most of the fish turned out to be bad. Most of them were discarded and their corpses literally laid on the earth as foretold in the Old Testament. So when we think about judgment, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.

These are the communicators of truth. To the extent that we can speak truth, we can offer hope and salvation. But it's a two-edged sword.

One side offers salvation, the other side is judgment. It's a two-edged sword and it is sharp. We need to first of all look at it applied to our own lives and then remember that as we communicate truth and as we follow in the footsteps and reiterate the words that have been given to us in this sword of the word of God, sword of the Spirit, it is the sword of the Spirit.

It's not the balm of the Spirit. It's not the healing ointment of the Spirit. It's not the anointing oil of the Spirit.

The word of God is the sword of the Spirit and it divides. That's what it means to be a fisher of men. That's what it means to represent the Lord Jesus on this earth.

When He communicated truth, it sorted people into two and only two groups, sheep and goats, good and bad, wheat and tares, wheat and chaff. We look first at that separation in our own souls, then we can look around. But if we've got a beam in our own eye, it's no time to be looking at specks in someone else's.

Well, it's a sobering thought. There's a lot here. What does it mean to cast the net? What does it mean to wash the net? What does it mean to mend the net? The net is the word of God and it constrains, it captures, it brings to the place of judgment.

We need to maintain its integrity. We need to maintain its purity and its effectiveness in our own lives first and then as we speak the truth in love to others, to those who are outside. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

When we come back, we are going to see Jesus in His Galilean ministry, the remaining few verses in chapter 4, and then we will start the great Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5. We'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank You for the

sobering truth of Your Word. We look to it for encouragement, for enlightenment, for uplift, and we appreciate the healing balm of Gilead that it provides for our souls, but we also recognize that it creates for us responsibility.

It brings us to the place of judgment. We pray that as we have the light shined in our souls and on our lives that we can see clearly that Your Holy Spirit will illuminate our options and our choices in such a way that we can make those that are in keeping with Your Word and with Your will, that reflect Your grace and Your patience, that allow us to partake of deliverance, cleansing, and to avail ourselves of the opportunities and the potentials that the Lord Jesus Christ died to give us. We pray that in all things He will be glorified and we ask it in His name.

Amen.