



HG257: Sharing Our Faith Like Jesus
The Calling Of The First Disciples

Matthew 4:18-5:16

Home Group Study Notes

14 May 2023 - James Van Cleef



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

You must chose one to attend: Eurovision Final or FA
Cup Final?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs
of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using
Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



HG257: Sharing Our Faith Like Jesus *The Calling Of The First Disciples*

Matthew 4:18-5:16

Home Group Sermon

14 May 2023 - James Van Cleef

Introduction

The theme for this home group series is ‘sharing our faith like Jesus,’ and from our reading today we will be able to see the impact of Jesus in the lives of ordinary people. The aim is to also help our understanding of 1) our worth, 2) our ability to be part of other people’s healing, 3) what our transformation in Christ looks like, and 4) the effect our faith has in a world marked by disorientation, brokenness and simple wrongheadedness.

So, as we look at the calling of the first disciples, see the reach of Jesus’ ministry, examine the markers of authentic faith, let us do so with the Holy Spirit bringing the revelation we need that keeps us in the vine.

You Want Me?

How do we share our faith the Jesus way? It begins by hearing the call of Jesus—the invitation into the Trinitarian life of Father, Son and Spirit—and by seeing ourselves as God sees us.

We see this with the calling of the first four disciples in Matthew. Peter, Andrew, James and John were fishermen. Why? Because their fathers were fishermen. Is there another reason? Maybe. As boys they would have gone to school to learn Torah, and there would have come a moment of decision: are they good enough to learn even more? So they would go to a rabbi as a hopeful ‘*talmid*’ (disciple), and ask, ‘Can I follow you?’ The rabbi would assess if they were good enough, or not.

We do this. Students are bombarded with messages like, ‘You can do anything you set your mind to,’ and from a young age begin the process of learning and exam taking. It culminates with A-Levels. So, they take their exams, and wait. Come August, they hold their dreams of being anything they set their mind to in one hand and their grades in the other. Will they make the cut? Will they be good enough? What happens if they don’t make the grade? What happens to their sense of self-worth?

Maybe Peter, Andrew, James and John were fishermen because they didn’t make the grade. Maybe they saw their peers advancing while they were fixing nets and gutting fish. Maybe they could only walk with their heads down. They were part of the ‘not-good-enoughs’. But Jesus calls them to be his ‘*talmidim*’. Jesus takes the initiative. Fall in behind. Follow my lead. Without hesitation or deviation, they jump right in... Why? Because they were chosen, perhaps for the first time in their lives.

What about you? Do you count yourself as one of the ‘not-good-enoughs’? God couldn’t love me. God couldn’t use me. God wouldn’t choose me. I’m broken. I’m damaged. I’m muddled. I’m not smart. I’m useless. I’m a mess. I’m not worth it.

Hear these words: ‘Make the Lord and his immense love for you constitutive of your personal worth. *Define yourself radically as one beloved by God.* God’s love for you and his choice of you constitute your worth’ (John Eagan).

Jesus may not be asking you to become a vicar, nun or monk. He may not be asking you to be the next Billy Graham. But his call to you, right now, as it was to those first disciples, is this: Before the foundation of the world you were chosen and are the beloved of God.

Ain’t Got a Hope in Hell

In Matthew 4.23-25 we get a summary of the ministry of Jesus, as he delivers the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven through preaching and healing. The Kingdom brings hope to the hopeless.

What is the Kingdom of Heaven? The Scriptures never give it definition, but reveal it through Jesus’ actions; it is something to experience. Here, Matthew tells us simply that Jesus was *‘teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people’* (v23).

Yet more is happening: People have been under siege and tormented by hostile and demonic spirits, by powers of derangement and destruction, people who were ostracised because of physical infirmity. And Jesus steps in to ensure their wholeness, their healing, curing their disorientation—he gives them an experience of the Kingdom of Heaven.

How can we share our faith the Jesus way if we struggle to heal people?

In the Gospels, the focus of healing stories is not healing but the Healer—Jesus the Christ. And in him we see the One who restores their true humanity as bearers of God’s image, especially in the forgiveness of sin and including the excluded (N.B. John 5.1-17; Mark 5.25-34).

Now this is something we can do: see people through Jesus’ eyes. Today people are not routinely excluded from society because of physical illness, yet the people we meet may well be harassed or broken or carry shame, and key to their wholeness may be our sympathy or empathy. It may leave them wondering, ‘Why does that person seem to like me? Why are they talking to me when others don’t?’ And it can begin simply by looking the other in the eye, and asking their name...

And the BEAT(itude) Goes On

Key to sharing our faith the Jesus way is authenticity. Now, we have all experienced the inauthentic: from our new best friend the salesman, to the smiling politician who promises prosperity and real change. And usually we can smell their insincerity...

The Beatitudes are markers of authentic Christlike character. John Wesley called them ‘the sum of all true religion.’ As we read them, we are not presented with an impossible ethical standard.

We are shown that not only is our life in Christ blessed, we, because of our transformation from darkness to light in Christ, bless others. To share our faith the Jesus way assumes not only that we follow Jesus, but also that our character is being transformed by his Spirit and in our living mirrors Jesus the Christ.

And what are the markers of authentic Christlike character?

- Poor in spirit: we can offer nothing and have confidence only in God
- Those who mourn: we grieve any kind of misery and suffering, especially sin (of society and our own)
- Meek: free from vengeance and malice, following God without pretension
- Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: we have not 'arrived' and so we pursue God even more... (righteousness is relational and not limited to ethics)
- Merciful: From whom do we receive mercy, and why? Go and do likewise...
- Pure in heart: Singleminded in our feelings, mind, and will. No hypocrisy
- Peacemakers: NOT peacekeepers, NOT appeasers. **PEACEMAKERS**
- Persecuted for the sake of righteousness: we will be persecuted for promoting God's saving ways and for following Jesus
- Reviled because of Jesus: We must stand up for Jesus, regardless of threat

I once heard a speaker say, 'There are two reasons why people don't become Christians. The first is they don't know any Christians. And the second is they do.' If we follow in the way of Jesus, we cannot also follow in the way of the world. If we walk in the light, we cannot also be in darkness. And if our lives mirror the Christ, then we have confidence that we are sharing our faith the Jesus way as we live out the norms of the Kingdom in a world plagued by disorientation.

Everywhere

Which brings us to this. Jesus then says to his disciples, '***You are the salt of the earth***', '***You are the light of the world***' (5.13-14 emphasis added).

Can you imagine what the disciples were thinking when Jesus said that? Put yourself in their sandals: You've just started following Jesus. He is healing the sick. He is saying some amazing things. And you really don't know anything. You're a novice, prone to falling for the 'go to the shop for a long stand' joke. Have you ever been served by a first-day trainee? But Jesus is quite emphatic: **YOU ARE** salt! **YOU ARE** light!

Now, they have some thinking to do. Yes, salt is useful as a preservative, for flavouring, and even for fertilising. We know pure salt is stable; it cannot lose its saltiness. But in their day salt was derived from salt marshes and was impure. The salt was liable to leaching out, leaving a worthless residue, losing its saltiness. Likewise, they were made to think about lamps and cities on hills. What do you do with lamps? Put them under something? Can you hide a city built on top of a hill? No. Lamps give light. Cities are seen.

What are the points Jesus is making? First, followers of Jesus can only be effective by maintaining Kingdom norms. Authentic disciples cannot be merciful *and* merciless, or poor in spirit *and* arrogant, or singleminded *and* duplicitous. James tells us that such are unstable in all their ways (see James 1.5-8).

So to maintain Kingdom norms we must abide in the vine. Second, living out the light of Jesus will be seen; it cannot be hidden. A secret, or hidden disciple of Jesus is an impossibility. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, wrote, 'Flight into the invisible is a denial of the call. A community of Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow Him.'

Jesus lays a challenge: as my followers, *'let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven'* (5.16). Sharing our faith the Jesus way is to do so openly, and leaving an impression everywhere we go...

That's a Wrap

Our reading helps us get to grips with sharing our faith the Jesus way. As I read it, I see a continual circular movement that begins with Jesus calling us to follow him.

When we follow Jesus, our character is transformed. And as our character is transformed, it is inevitable that everyone with whom we have contact glimpses at least a snapshot of Jesus. So, everywhere we go the light of Christ is seen. And as that happens, the 'not-good-enoughs' are given hope for life in the Kingdom. And when they hear Jesus call them by name, they follow him. And as they follow, their character is transformed. And as their character is transformed... You get the picture.

The world—and the church—needs Jesus. And Jesus has called ordinary people—you and I—to follow him and be salt and light. To share our faith the Jesus way. *Amen.*

Emmanuel Church Text 2023



*The LORD bless you and keep you: the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you: the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-26*

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Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: 'Make the Lord and his immense love for you constitutive of your personal worth. *Define yourself radically as one beloved by God.* God's love for you and his choice of you constitute your worth' (John Eagan). Do you find this easy?

2: Religion can often exclude people. How do you offer welcome to those who know nothing of Jesus while at the same time as maintaining Kingdom norms?

3: Look at everyone through Jesus' eyes. What might we discover about them? About ourselves?

4: John Wesley called the Beatitudes ‘the sum of all true religion.’ Can the bar for Christian living be set so high we find it more discouraging than encouraging?

5: Discuss Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s statement, ‘Only the obedient believe.’

6: Paul’s description of his world in Romans 1.29-32 is relevant to today’s world. How can followers of Jesus be salt and light in these circumstances?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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