

Following Jesus

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[0:00] Brilliant. Thank you so much. Let me introduce myself because there are lots of new faces since last time I was here. I'm Archie. Like Cater said, I'm the pastor at People's Evangelical Church just down the road.

I hope that you guys know about People's Evangelical Church, that you've been praying for us. Please do and keep praying for us. We've just launched a new vision and mission down the road there.

And this is our vision. We want to see the people in People's and beyond transformed by the good news about Jesus. That could be any church's vision, couldn't it?

And this is our mission. We want to proclaim the good news, disciple one another and serve our community. Again, that could be the mission of any church, couldn't it? But please pray for us as we seek to do those things. We'd love for you to come and visit us down in People's. It's less than an hour down the road.

And they'll be all right without you here for a Sunday. If you want to come and visit, that would be great. Even better if you get fed up of city life, come and move to People's and get involved. We'd love to have you. We love it in People's, Katie and I. But it is brilliant coming back here. I love Edinburgh.

[1:05] In fact, when I was 18, I'd just left school and I moved to Edinburgh. My grandmother lived here. I moved in with her. The plan was to get a job, you know, just in a cafe or a shop, work for six months and then go travelling for a bit before uni.

There was one day I looked a bit like this. How strange is AI? But I did have hair back then, 18. And I walked all around the city centre. And I must have given my CV to genuinely every shop and every cafe on Princes Street and George Street and all the roads that connect them.

I think I hand out over 100 CVs that day. It's a strange thing, isn't it? A CV, your resume, if you're American, curriculum vitae. It means course of life. And it's constantly changing, isn't it?

I couldn't find it. I couldn't find it, but I'd love to go back and find that CV from all those years ago and see how much it has changed. What kind of qualifications and experiences I could now add to it.

Because that's sort of the goal with a CV, isn't it? For it not just to change, but to grow through life. I wonder what your CV says about you. One page to summarise all of your gifts and abilities and your work experience.

[2:24] And I want you to imagine with me that that CV is much less narrow than just kind of your working life and your studying and your employment. Imagine you had one page to summarise you. To define all of your gifts and abilities and life experiences.

What would that page say about you? You know, when you go to a party or just when you meet someone new, what are the kind of first questions that we always ask one another?

You get past what your name is and where you live. It's what do you do? Or what are you studying? Maybe do you have kids? Here's the point. In work and in life, so much of our identity, how we think about ourselves, how we think about each other, who we are.

So much of our identity is tied up in these things, the kinds of things that end up on a CV. And it's so fragile. Do we realise how fragile that is to think about ourselves like that?

Now what happens when those things stop moving forward for us? Maybe you fail an exam. Or you lose your job. Or promotions don't come at the pace that you had hoped.

[3 : 35] Or in life, when we take what feels to be a step backwards, when kids start to leave home. Or retirement comes. Or your marriage changes. When your health starts to falter. See how fragile all of that is.

It's a place for us to ground our identity. And we picture these things printed in ink like a CV, but it's pencil. And life is an eraser.

But if you're a Christian here this morning, this passage comes as a wonderful and really helpful reminder. If you're not a Christian, there's a really important invitation in this for you.

Because as Jesus calls his first disciples, he gives them, and I think he gives us, an identity that is utterly secure. And a purpose that is eternally significant.

He says, come, follow me. And following this king gives us an utterly secure identity. We'll see that. And he says, I will send you to fish for people.

[4 : 38] And we'll see that is an eternally significant purpose. Come, follow me, and I will send you. So that's where we're going. But how does that fit into the kind of bigger picture of Matthew's gospel?

You guys all know this if you've been here over the last few months because you've been in Matthew's gospel. I had to remind myself of it. I'm going to remind you of it too. Because this book is all about Jesus as the promised king.

And Matthew wants to show us that Jesus is the one who fulfills all the promises of the Old Testament. So he begins his letter like this. This is the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

And then he kind of lists Jesus' genealogy. Before Matthew gets into the kind of famous story of Jesus' birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, he begins by establishing Jesus' credentials as the promised king.

That's what Messiah or Christ means. Anointed one, chosen one. He's the king. But Jesus is much more than just the earthly king of ancient Israel.

[5 : 43] Because just after the genealogy, Matthew tells us how this king was born. He says, This is how the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph.

But before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. And you know this. This is one of the big miraculous claims of all time, that Jesus was born to a virgin.

Because he wasn't just an earthly king. And Matthew tells us he came to save his people from their sins. That's what his name means. Jesus' savior. All to fulfill this promise, again from Matthew, that the virgin would conceive and give birth to a son.

And they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. He's much more than an ordinary earthly king. He is God with us. He's the king of the universe.

So Jesus is born. And then in Matthew's gospel, we're introduced to John the Baptist. And he's like a herald for the king. And you saw, I guess this would have been a couple of weeks ago.

[6 : 45] Or if you took a break over Christmas, it might have even been before Christmas. But in chapter 3, he said, Repent. John the Baptist said, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. That just means turn around.

Realign your lives. Because the kingdom has come near. Because the king has come near. And last week, you saw Jesus' first public appearance. Jesus is now a man. And Jesus says exactly the same thing as what John the Baptist said.

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. So up to this point, Matthew has been building this picture of us. Of Jesus, the king of the universe, coming with a message of repentance, saying, realign your life to this, because the kingdom of heaven, my kingdom, has come near.

And that, I think, probably leaves us with questions up to this point. Like, what is that actually going to look like? What does it mean to repent? What does following Jesus as king mean?

What is his kingdom like? And really, the bulk of the rest of this book answers all of those questions for you. So if you've got those questions, stick around. I guess you're going to be unpacking that over the following weeks and months.

[7 : 56] But Matthew starts here in our passage, just explaining that straight away. So come back to it with me. If you've closed your Bible, or if you've been flicking through the first couple of chapters with me there, turn to chapter 4.

It's on page 968 of the church Bibles. Do get it open in front of you. And this is a really simple story, but it's a really powerful story. To get us into it, I'm just going to tell the story from the perspective of Zebedee.

And if you look at verse 21, he's the father of the second set of brothers. So this is the voice of Zebedee. I was just mending the nets when I heard him.

He was just a short way up the shore. And he called out to one of the boats. He said to the brothers there, come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

And Simon and Andrew didn't even argue. They didn't even ask any questions. They just downed tools, jumped out of their boats. It's as if they'd been waiting for this guy their entire lives.

[8 : 56] I couldn't believe it. You don't just walk away from your trade like that. How are you going to feed the family? How are you going to pay the tax man? And then this man on the shore, he began to walk in our direction.

And he looked at my boat. And he looked at my sons. And I knew what was coming before he even opened his mouth. Follow me, he said.

No preamble from him. And no hesitation from them. My sons, James dropped his net. John just kind of looked at me and nodded and they walked away.

Following him like the tide itself had turned. And I just stood there with torn nets and empty hands, amazed. Who is this man that these men would drop everything to follow him?

That's the story. And as we unpack that together, like I say, we're really going to focus in on that one verse. The key invitation from Jesus, which comes in verse 19. Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people.

[10 : 05] First, we're going to focus on this. Just come, follow me. And we'll see that that invitation is the offer of an identity that is utterly secure. We've already seen that Matthew is introducing Jesus as king.

That big driving statement, repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near. And that story that we've just listened to illustrates what it means to do that.

The brothers, they drop everything to follow him, to follow the king. And notice where the initiative comes from in that. Those words, come, follow me.

For a first century Jewish reader, the original readers of this book, I'm sure they would have had this in mind as they read them. Because they were familiar words in a similar context. They were the words used for those who followed behind a well-respected rabbi, a teacher, to learn from him.

And so normally the way that would work is a man would apply to a rabbi. They'd seek a rabbi out and ask to follow him, to be his disciple. Notice here how Jesus flips that on his head.

[11:10] And he takes all the initiative and he says to them, come, follow me. And Jesus continues to work like that today.

He graciously invites us. He invites you. He says, would you like to come? Would you like to follow me? And if you do, we'll see. It will change everything for you.

It starts for these fishermen with their career. That's really emphasized with those first two brothers, with Simon and Andrew. See how Matthew is really keen to make that point that they're fishing in verse 18.

Why are they fishing? Well, he tells us because they're fishermen. Even the way that Jesus calls them, he emphasizes this about them. You're fishermen. Come fish for people. And as they respond, what is it that they leave?

Those specific brothers leave their nets behind. For them, following Jesus, it started by allowing him to be more important to them than their career. Fishing, it was a very ordinary career in first century Galilee.

[12:14] These are just normal people. You might think of them as kind of middle class. This was a family business. They're not like crazy, elite, wealthy folk, but they're not slaves either. Just normal people.

I guess they're just like most of us. Just ordinary folk. I said right at the start, this is one of the first things we go to, isn't it? One of the first things we ask, what do you do?

What do you study? I want to ask you, how do you feel about what you do? Whatever it is that you do, whether you're a student or it's your job or you're retired. It could even just be a hobby that you spend most of your time doing.

Sport or whatever else it is. How do you feel about that? Does it define you? I mean, to be honest, I think it would be strange if it didn't a little bit, just instinctively.

Because it's what we spend so much of our time doing. And in some ways, it's only natural that that's going to shape how we think about ourselves. But do you see the danger in that?

[13:14] Because it's just not secure. Think about how fragile that is. I handed out over 100 CVs that day and I didn't get a single job offer. It's fragile.

For most of us, our occupation itself will reward performance, right? We'll strive for and kind of crave the approval of our bosses and our lecturers and our teachers.

And that's fragile. I mean, if you're anything like me, you'll have some days that are super productive and some that are much less so. If we're defined by that, it's just not secure.

And of course, it could all just be pulled away from under us at any moment. Maybe you feel invincible in whatever your occupation is. But speak to anyone in the room who's ever lost their job.

Or struggled with the transition out of work and into retirement. Or if your identity is tied up in sport, maybe you know the feeling of when you get injured. It's all so fragile.

[14:20] And I think this passage would say, just don't let that stuff define you. Those aren't bad things, like career, occupation, sport. It's all good. Just don't make it your everything.

Don't let it define you. Don't let yourself attach your identity to it. Instead, Jesus says, come, follow me.

Let your response to that invitation define you. That you're one who follows the king of the universe. That's the first set of brothers. And if that's not challenging enough, with the second set, it moves from career to family.

See how Matthew emphasizes that? Look at verse 21. We're told they're brothers. He repeats that they're brothers. It tells us that they're sons of Zebedee. Repeats that too. And when Jesus asks them to follow him, what is it they leave?

Well, they leave their boat too, but they also leave their father. Can you imagine the conversation that Mr. Zebedee had with Mrs. Zebedee when he got home that night? What do you mean they're gone?

[15:27] They just got up and left. Where are they going? Who is this man? Family is so important to us, isn't it? And it's really emotive, I think. Now, I don't think that this passage is a blueprint for us to disown our parents.

Some of you might want to do that. You'll see later on in Matthew that Jesus has really strong words for those who neglect their parents and try and use Scripture to back it up. That's not the application here. But Jesus does also say, again, later in Matthew, he says that if there is a conflict between family loyalties and Jesus, Jesus wins every time.

Let me say that again. If you have to choose between family and Jesus, Jesus wins every time. It's hard to hear that, isn't it?

I don't know how you feel about family, but I find that a hard thing to hear. If you're a strongly family-oriented person, again, maybe your identity is tied to that.

In this story, it's really from the perspective of kids leaving their parents. But I think this might be even more radical and maybe more applicable to most of us in the room if you are a parent. Especially if you're in those early stages where your whole purpose can feel wrapped up in your family life.

[16:46] To be clear, I think family is really important. For me, I find this more challenging than occupation by miles. I appreciate that's not true for everyone, but a bit like career, let's see how fragile a foundation family actually is for our identity.

Again, it's a very natural thing. In fact, I think it's probably impossible for this not to feel like a huge part of who we are and how we think about ourselves. Again, that's true for me, but increasingly, the older I get, the more I recognize how fragile that is.

Relationships change. Expectations in a family change. People change. Families are really fragile. Maybe you've experienced that firsthand.

It can come from a big move or a death in the family, an argument and lingering bitterness. What would it do to you if you were to find out that your family harbored some horrible secret?

Or if you found out that they weren't your real family at all? These things happen. And so family identity is fragile. And the truth is, if our identity is rooted in family, we will eventually get let down one way or another.

[18:02] It is far from secure. I hope this is starting to get uncomfortable. But we need to recognize that Jesus is the king of the universe.

And he has all authority to ask this of us, to ask us for all of life. But actually, this is a wonderful thing. Family is a wonderful gift. It's a wonderful gift.

But the identity that we're being offered here is so much more secure than that. It doesn't mean we no longer have families. Of course, we do and they're good. But it means that our identity is rooted in something utterly solid.

If we would be followers of the king of the universe. So for these fishermen, the spotlight was on their occupation and on their family. We've talked about those things for ourselves.

But if we're honest, there could be any number of things that lay claims on our identity like that. Things that are so important to us that they're kind of intimately connected to how we think about ourselves and who we are.

[19 : 04] That might be your nationality. It might be your sexuality. It might be your politics. It might be the ways that you've suffered in life. It might be certain personality traits.

It might be your image. It could even be your position in church. If you're an elder or a worship leader. Whatever it is, there are so many things that lay claim on who we are.

On our identity. And all of them are utterly fragile. And could be taken from us any moment. If you're not a Christian this morning.

If you're a new Christian even. And you're just kind of feeling your way into this. This is a big deal. And I appreciate it can sound like quite a scary thing. But honestly, it is so freeing.

When the most important thing about who you are is utterly secure. That is a wonderful thing. But it requires a really radical change.

[20 : 03] A reorientation of life. Really, that's repentance. It's what Jesus demands of us. A turning away from all those other things in life that lay claim on us. And allowing our identity to be in him.

And if you are a Christian this morning. Maybe you've been a Christian for ages. I wonder if you've forgotten just how radical a thing this is. To have said to this king, I will follow you.

And it's just possible this was true for me. As I studied this this week. If you're really honest with yourself. Yes, you've chosen to follow Jesus. Yes, you know that that was, that that is all of life.

But maybe it's just possible that you've let some of those other things in life that used to define you creep back in. Is it possible that their whispered claims have grown louder and louder without you even realizing?

Well, this morning, let me invite you to hear those whispered claims. To recognize them. But then hearing you, Jesus' invitation. Come. Follow me.

[21 : 08] And as he asks that, he doesn't ask you for your CV. He doesn't ask you what you're good at. He doesn't need to know how ambitious you are or how much potential you have.

He gives you a new identity as a follower of Christ before you even do anything. And becoming a follower of Christ is not just another line on your CV. It's not another thing to define us.

It is the thing. It means all those other things no longer define who we are. He says, come, follow me. And it is utterly secure to be a follower of Jesus.

And it is an identity that comes with real purpose. And the translation that you guys use here in the church Bibles, the NIV, says, I will send you out to fish for people.

And other translations have, I will make you fishers of men. And I want us to see something helpful in that. Because their purpose is tied to their identity.

[22 : 07] They move from being fishermen to literally fishermen of men. As Jesus says, I will send you.

I wonder if you've ever had that existential moment. It might have happened in the shower. Often comes late at night. Maybe in a deep conversation with a best friend. Maybe just your own lonely thoughts.

But that moment where you start to ask, is this it? Like, is this really what my life is for? If I keep going with my kind of day-to-day, what will I have actually done with it all?

In other words, what's my purpose in life? Well, in this passage, Jesus, he gives those who come and follow him a brand new purpose in life. A purpose that is eternally significant.

As he says, I will send you out to fish for people. To be fishers of men. And I think it's implied in verse 21 with the second set of brothers. We're not told exactly what Jesus said.

[23:06] Just that he called them. I think it's fair to assume that that is therefore the same call that he gave the first set of brothers. Follow me, come fish for people. This is what it means to follow Jesus.

Is to be a fisher of men. And so what does it mean to do that? What is this new purpose that Jesus gives them? Well, to put it simply, I think it is to do what Jesus has been doing.

It is to proclaim, repent. For the kingdom of heaven is near. In other words, it's encouraging others to turn around and follow the king of that heavenly kingdom. That they might receive eternal life.

That's fishing for men. It's an eternally significant purpose. But I guess for some of us, maybe even most of us in the room, sitting there thinking, I couldn't possibly do that.

Or I would never be very good at that. Or I've tried and it didn't work. Think that about yourself. I don't have what it takes to encourage other people into the kingdom.

[24:11] I'm happy to follow the king myself. Grateful for this new identity. But I'm going to have to leave the sharing about it to other people. But be encouraged by this.

See what Jesus says. And again, he takes the initiative. It's not, come, follow me and then go fish for people. In our translations, we have something like that.

I will send you. But other translations, I will make you fishers of men. To these brothers, he's saying, come and learn from me. Be my disciples.

That's what it means to be taught by someone. He says, I will teach you. I will show you. Ultimately, I will make you. I will shape you into fishers of men. I will send you. And that's what you're going to see in the rest of Matthew.

These men following Jesus, learning from him as he shapes them into those who go and share the good news themselves. And if you'll let it, this book can do the same thing for you.

[25:11] You might not feel today particularly well equipped to share the good news. You might not feel ready. But I think if you'll journey with Jesus through the rest of this book, that's what he's doing.

He's shaping and forming you into fishers of men. In fact, here how Jesus, how Matthew ends his book, Jesus is kind of parting words to his disciples, right?

They've followed him. They've watched him go up to Jerusalem to die. They've seen him come back from the dead. We're back in Galilee. And he says this to them, famous words from Matthew 28.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. This is the kind of final statement as he sends them out to fish for people. He says, make disciples.

[26:14] That is, as you have followed me, encourage others to follow me. Fish for people. How? Well, he says, go. You've got to go. Do you see that?

Go to those who don't know Jesus. And do you know this? These couple of verses have almost always been used as an encouragement to become a missionary. You know, to go to unreached people groups, to go over there.

As if we were in first century Galilee and over the seas lies the unreached people. And look, there's no harm in going overseas to proclaim the good news.

We want to support that work. But we need to see that Scotland is not ancient Galilee. Scotland is the nations. The unreached people aren't just over there. They're here.

And for most of us, maybe even all of us in the room, fishing for people isn't going to mean crossing oceans. It's going to mean staying put and following Jesus closely.

[27:12] But we still need to see the command to go. You've got to intentionally go towards the people who are already around you. Who aren't yet in his kingdom. That means seeing the streets that we live on.

And our schools, our tutorials at university, our workplaces, our clubs, our friendships, our families. Seeing them as the very places where the good news about Jesus' kingdom can be shared.

He says, go, be active in sharing the good news. Then he says, baptize. And that is really just a symbol of new life. Of one who has repented, realigned their lives with God's kingdom.

He says, share the good news about Jesus Christ. That people might respond to it and join his kingdom. That's what baptism is. The sign of someone joining his kingdom. So let's not shy away from this then.

We go to people. Not that we only ever become friends with them as kind of conversion projects. And then drop them if they don't respond well to the good news. We can and should love people well.

[28:17] Be good friends to people. But I think even as we do that, we can be clear and say, we do want to share the good news as we do that. And we do want people to respond to it. Not just to hear it, but to follow him.

To be baptized. And to join the kingdom. He says, go. He says, baptize. He says, teach. Because fishing for men isn't just about getting people into the kingdom.

But about a lifelong following of Jesus. Becoming his disciples. Teaching and growing together that we might better obey all that he has taught. That we might better live as those with this new identity of those who follow the king.

So that's what it is to fish for people. And how do you feel about that? How do you feel about that task? I think it's pretty daunting. And I think it would remain impossibly daunting if not for this.

Notice how Jesus frames his command. He begins by saying, all authority in heaven and on earth have been given to me. Remember who this is. The one who gives this command is the God of the universe.

[29:24] He created it all. He has all authority over it. Over your heart and over the hearts of the people with whom you're going to share the good news. But much more than that.

At the end of verse 28. See what he says. Surely I am with you always. You're not on your own. Jesus came.

He died. He rose again. He ascended into heaven. But he sent his spirit to equip us and comfort us and encourage us and enable us. He's the king of the universe.

He has all authority. And he is with you always. To be fishers of men is an eternally significant purpose. And we might feel ill-equipped for it.

In fact, in many ways, I think we should feel ill-equipped. In ourselves, we are ill-equipped. But Jesus says that he will make you fishers of men.

[30 : 22] So follow him. Learn from him. Jesus reminds us of who he is. He has all authority. He is with us always. The Christian life isn't easy.

The purpose of the Christian life isn't inactive. It's hard. But it's really good. It's eternally significant. See, the problem with a CV-shaped life is that the purpose will always be fragile.

It will always have an expiry date. You're always going to end up asking at some point, is this all I'm really living for? But Jesus gives us a purpose that will never fade, that can never retire or plateau.

In the kingdom, you don't stop at 65. In the kingdom, your purpose doesn't depend on your health or your status or your income. It doesn't even depend on your own ability.

Because we follow this king. And he's the one who shapes us and sends us. And so if you're a Christian in the room, this is your purpose. This is what he's going to spend the rest of your life doing, making you into fishes of men.

[31 : 34] Just as we finish, one more detail in the text to notice. See how Matthew describes the response of these fishermen. Simon, Peter and Andrew, if you look at verse 20, they leave at once.

James and John, verse 22, they leave immediately. Look, I don't know where you're at on your journey, but I'm sure there are some people in the room who haven't yet decided to follow Jesus.

Maybe you're really new to all of this and you're just not sure yet. Maybe you've been exploring for a while and you can kind of see the value in it. Maybe you're even convinced that it's true, but you don't know that you're ready to dive in yet.

And that's fine. Look, wherever you're at, please keep exploring it. But don't miss this. The response of these fishermen at once, immediately they follow Jesus. And you can do that too.

You could do that today. And that doesn't mean, following Jesus doesn't mean you've got it all together. It doesn't mean that all your questions have been neatly answered. But if you're committed to following Jesus, you've got a lifetime of learning from him.

[32 : 45] And maybe you've been doing that for a while. But if you're honest, you've drifted a bit. You've allowed other things in life to become your identity or to give you purpose.

Well, he continues to call you. Hear him call you this morning. He says, come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men. Do you know, the big question of this passage isn't would you quit your job for Jesus?

It isn't would you leave your family for Jesus? The question is, who has the right to tell you who you are? Who has the power to tell you what your life is for?

Well, he's the king of the universe. So would you let Jesus do that? Would you let Jesus define your identity? Would you let Jesus give you ultimate purpose in life?

It's a wonderful thing to be a Christian. We have an utterly secure identity and an eternally significant purpose. In a moment, I'm going to hand back over to Simon and we're going to sing a couple of songs just as we reflect on what we've heard.

[33 : 55] But first, let me pray for us. Why don't I pray? Heavenly Father, I thank you so much for Jesus. Lord, for the identity that you have given us as followers of the king.

And Lord, I want to pray for those amongst us this morning who are feeling particularly lost or fragile. And I pray that you would help them lay claim to this identity and rest in it.

That those of us who are Christians this morning would know who you say that we are.
Not earned, but given.

And Lord, as we look to a renewed purpose, maybe for those who feel particularly
directionless and purposeless this morning.

Lord, would you by your spirit be shaping us, making us, forming us and sending us to fish
for people.

[35 : 05] That many might follow you into new life and into eternity. For your glory and in Jesus
name. Amen.