

# Matthew 4:18-22

## - Fishers of men -

**Author: Evert Jan Hempenius**

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### Introduction

- ❖ At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, we read: “Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘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’” Eleven disciples have been commissioned by the resurrected Jesus to go into the world and make disciples of all nations.
- ❖ Since Jesus gave this commission, this has been an ongoing process. Disciples are making new generations of disciples.
- ❖ This sermon outline takes us back to the very beginning when Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee. There, he called four fishermen. “**Come, follow me,**’ Jesus said, **‘and I will make you fishers of men’**” (Mt 4:20).
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Gospel of Matthew. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

### Context

- ❖ To understand the teachings of Jesus, a brief summary of the historical background is necessary.
- ❖ The baptism of Jesus (Mt 3:13-17):

- Before Jesus was baptized by John, he said: “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this **to fulfill all righteousness.**”
- And afterwards: “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw **the Spirit of God** descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”
  - The Sermon on the Mount teaches this **fulfilment of all righteousness.** <> “For I tell you that unless **your righteousness surpasses** that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law...” (Mt 5:20).
- ❖ The preaching of Jesus:
  - Jesus had already been preaching in the synagogues in Galilee for some time before he delivered his sermon on the mount. Matthew summarized these sermons as follows:
    - “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**’” (Mt 4:17).
  - Jesus continued and took over the ministry of John the Baptist:
    - “In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, ‘**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**’” (Mt 3:1–2).
  - And later on, when Jesus sends out his twelve disciples:
    - “As you go, preach this message: ‘**The kingdom of heaven is near**’” (Mt 10:7).
    - After Jesus had called his disciples, he preached the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon will become the basic instruction for the disciples. The sermon will be the core of their teaching (Mt 28:19).
    - These two themes, repentance and the kingdom, are prominent in the Sermon on the Mount.
- ❖ The life of Jesus Christ:
  - Jesus taught the Law and the Prophets, and he lived according to the Law and the Prophets. The Sermon on the Mount reflects his life. He lived according to his own teachings and by doing so set an example for his followers, the disciples. A clear example is found in Matthew 5:39: “Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” When Jesus was arrested, he didn’t strike back.
- ❖ The future of the kingdom:
  - After his resurrection, Jesus summoned his eleven disciples to go back to the mount: “**All authority in heaven and on earth** has been given to me. Therefore go and **make disciples of all nations** (...) and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**” (Mt 28:18-20).

- They will be fishers of men.
  - This authority is reflected in expressions like: “**But I tell you** that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment” (Mt 5:22).
- ❖ And in: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘**Lord, Lord,**’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but...” (Mt 7:20).
- ❖ The immediate context shows the following pattern.

Matthew 4:12-17	Jesus returned to Galilee. “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’ (Mt 4:17).
Matthew 4:18-22	Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee. He called the first four disciples. “Come, follow me!” (Mt 4:19).
Matthew 4:23-25	“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people” (Mt 4:23). “Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him” (Mt 4:25).
Matthew 5:1, 2	“Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them” (Mt 5:1, 2).

## Form and structure

- ❖ The structure of Matthew 4:18-22 reveals two parallels.

<i>The calling of Peter and Andrew (verse 18-20)</i>	As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him.
<i>The calling of James and John (verse 21-22)</i>	Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets.

	<p>Jesus called them,</p> <p>and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.</p>
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- ❖ All four were fishermen. They were busy. Peter and Andrew were fishing. James and John were preparing their nets for fishing. All four men immediately and at once left their nets and boat. James and John left also their father.

## Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

### Word studies

- ❖ Follow = “ἀκολουθέω”:
  - 2. **to follow or accompany someone who takes the lead**, *accompany, go along with*, often of the crowd following (Mt 4:25; 8:1; 12:15; 14:13; Mk 5:24; Lk 7:9; 9:11; Jn 6:2.).
  - 3. with transition to the figurative meaning. **to follow someone as a disciple**, *be a disciple, follow*.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ Call = “καλέω”:
  - 3. **to use authority to have a person or group appear, summon**.<sup>2</sup>
    - to urgently invite someone to accept responsibilities for a particular task, implying a new relationship to the one who does the calling—‘to call, to call to a task.’<sup>3</sup>

## Exposition

### Verse 18-22 *The first four disciples:*

- ❖ Immediately after his baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Doing so, he reenacted the history of Israel in the desert. Where Israel failed, Jesus succeeded in his obedience to the father. In the present story, he gathered the New Israel, beginning the call of his first disciples. The gospel enters a new phase.
  - “The initiative lies with the master. He is choosing them, not they him.”<sup>4</sup> See John 15:19.

<sup>1</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 36).

<sup>2</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 503).

<sup>3</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, Vol 1., p. 423).

- Disciples following a master was not unique. John the Baptist had his disciples as did the Pharisees (Mt 9:14).
- The first four, Peter, Andrew, James, and John will receive “special privileges.”
  - Jesus took James, Peter and John with him to top of the mount of transfiguration (Mt 7:1-13).
  - Jesus allowed James, Peter, and John to witness the resuscitation of the daughter of Jairus (Mk 5:21-43).
  - These four disciples asked Jesus privately about the thing to come (Mk 13:3, 4).
  - Jesus took them, except Andrew, along with him to pray (Mk 14:33).
  - They are mentioned first in the list of the twelve (Mt 10:2, Acts 1:13).
  - The apostle Paul called Peter, James, and John “pillars” (Gal 2:9).
- Did they know Jesus before he called them? Yes, at least some of them!
  - Jesus had been preaching in their synagogues for a while (Mt 4:17). Andrew, the brother of Peter, had previously been a disciple of John the Baptist (Jn 1:35-40).
- ❖ **“Jesus said.”** “Matthew’s **historical present** places emphasis upon Jesus’ and perhaps more readily encourages the reader to apply the following words to himself.<sup>5</sup>
- ❖ **“Follow me.”** This is an unconditional command!
  - “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not **take his cross and follow me** is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”
    - To love Jesus more than anyone else.
    - To take your cross, begin prepared to die for the cause of the Kingdom (Mt 5:10; 5:11-12).
    - To lose your life for the sake of Christ.
  - Similar: “If anyone would come after me, **he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me**. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done” (Mt 16:24-27).

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<sup>4</sup> Davies, W. D., & Allison, D. C., Jr. (2004, p. 396).

<sup>5</sup> Davies, W. D., & Allison, D. C., Jr. (2004, p. 397).

- Peter answered him, “We have left everything **to follow you!** What then will there be for us?’ Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, **you who have followed me** will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life” (Mt 19:27-29).
- “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’ Jesus turned and said to Peter, **‘Get behind me, Satan!** You are a stumbling block to me; **you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.’**
  - Peter didn’t want Jesus to die and rebuked him. The reaction of Jesus is very clear. **“Get behind me, Satan!** You are a stumbling block to me.”
  - Positively, we learn from this passage that **the follower of Jesus must have in mind the things of God, not the things of men.** The things of God imply salvation for mankind.

❖ **“I will make you.”** What follows is a selection of references. Many more can be adduced.

- Jesus revealed himself to his disciples. The apostle John describes the mystery of Jesus Christ very extensively by the keywords **“to see”** and **“to know.”**
  - “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. **We have seen his glory,** the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth”(Jn 1:14).
  - “Jesus answered: **“Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.** How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.”
  - The disciples learned to recognize Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah.
    - “Thomas said to him, **‘My Lord and my God!’** Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But **these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”** (Jn 20:28-31).

- “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: **God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ**” (Acts 2:36).
  - Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets.
    - “He said to them (the disciples on their way to Emmaus), ‘How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ **And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself**” (Lk 24:25-27).
  - Jesus promised the Holy Spirit.
    - “If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you” (Jn 14:15-17).
  - Jesus renewed their characters and their minds by the Holy Spirit.
    - “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22, 23).
    - “For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love” (2 Pet 1:5-7).
    - “Therefore, I (Paul) urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom 12: 1, 2).
  - Jesus confronted them with their little faith and their sinful nature.
    - “When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken” (Lk 5:8, 9).
  - Jesus taught them the centrality of the forgiveness of sins.
    - **“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins”** (Mt 6:14, 15).
  - Jesus made them witnesses of the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension into heaven, as our King of Glory.

- “Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. **For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection**” (Acts 1:21, 22).
  - Jesus taught them and commanded them to preach and to teach.
    - “Whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:19).
    - “Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:20).
    - “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 3:38, 39).
      - Jesus encouraged them: “To speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly” (Philip 1:14; Eph 6:19, 20).
  - Jesus taught them to fear God, to have faith, to trust God, and to trust him.
    - **Important.** God-fearing men and women are mentioned in Acts 2:5; 10:2, 35; 13:26, 50; 17:4, 17).
      - **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”** (Prov 1:7).<sup>6</sup>
    - “If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them” (Mt 6:30-32; Mt 8:23-27; Mt 17:20-21).
    - “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me” (Jn 14:1).
    - Jesus taught them to pray (Lk 11:1-13; Mt 6:9-14) urgently (Mt 7:7-11).
  - Jesus commanded them to love one another.
    - “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (Jn 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17).
  - Jesus gave them, what we might call, practical training in sending them first to the “lost sheep of Israel” (Mt 10:6). After his resurrection he will send them to the gentiles too:

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<sup>6</sup> “**Fear the Lord**” is an important theme in the Books of Deuteronomy (Law), Psalms and Proverbs.



“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” (Mt 28:19).

- Jesus prepared them for disappointments by telling, for instance, the parable of the sower (Mt 13:1-8) and the explanation of this parable (Mt 13:18-23) and other parables.
  - Jesus showed them that their fate may be similar to the fate of the prophets of the Old Testament.
    - “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Mt 5: 11, 12).

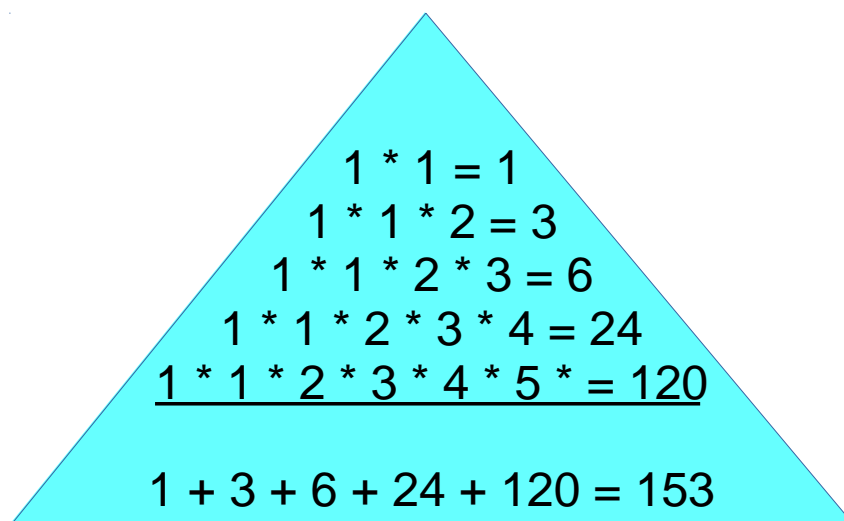
❖ **“Fishers of men.”**

- Jesus used to images for preaching the gospel:
  - The image of fishing.
  - The image of the harvest (Mt 9:36-38).
- An example is found, when Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection. “Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish you have just caught.’ Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn” (Jn 21:10, 11).<sup>7</sup>
- Fishers of men is about salvation. See the application.

❖ **“At once / immediately.”** Compare this with “Another disciple said to him, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ But Jesus told him, ‘Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead’” (Mt 8:21-22).

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<sup>7</sup> The Number 153 is not by chance. It is built up like this.



- When Jesus calls a person to discipleship, there is no excuse for delay or disobedience.<sup>8</sup>
- Some of them, and probably all of them, had seen and heard Jesus before. See above. They knew his voice. They don't follow a stranger.

## Application

### Verse 18-22

- ❖ Praise the Lord for calling men and women to serve the church in spreading the Gospel of Salvation in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ❖ Teach the church to pray for many more workers.
  - “When he (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field’ (Mt 9:36-38).
- ❖ Teach the church that fishers of men need to follow Christ, the Lamb.
  - “They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb” (Rev 14:4).
    - They need faith and trust in Christ.
    - They need to love and to obey Christ.
    - They need to love one another, and in general people, regardless their background and status.
    - They need to have a profound knowledge of the Scriptures, and to know how to apply, to teach, and to practice the righteousness of the Kingdom of God.
    - They need to be willing to suffer for the sake of Christ and take upon their cross, which might involve imprisonment or even a death sentence.
- ❖ It is all about salvation!
  - Jesus trained and commissioned the “fishers of men” to preach the Gospel of Salvation:
    - The proclamation of Jesus: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (Jn 3:16, 17).

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<sup>8</sup> Blomberg, C. (1992, p. 91).

- “For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 13:47).
- To the Romans, Paul wrote: “But what does it say? ‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (Rm 10:8-13).
- To Timothy, Paul wrote: “So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.
  - Timothy belongs to the second generation of “fishers of men.”
- The apostle Paul wrote to Titus: “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying” (Titus 3:4-8).
- The author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote: “Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he (Jesus) is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”
- James, the brother of Jesus wrote: “Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.” (Js 1:21).

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