

“Knowing God: Who Is This Jesus?”

Reading again from our gospel lesson, Matthew, chapter four: (Jesus said), “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (And it says), “At once, they left their nets and followed him.”

It has often struck me, as I consider this calling Jesus gave to those first disciples (to become his followers), how (and why), at a moment's notice, they were willing to leave behind everything they had and follow? Matthew says, “At once, they left what they were doing and they followed.”

Why did they do that? (What was going on?) After all, it wasn't as if they had nothing better to do. I mean, really? They weren't just sitting around doing nothing. (They were busy.) They were doing what they had been trained to do. They were fishermen. Their job was to catch fish. And they were good at it. They worked hard at it. (It was their life's work.) And it was an important work, especially in the first century.

And, not only that, but they didn't have the advantage of (knowing then) what you and I know today. (Just think about it.) We can look back on what happened, (his life, death, resurrection), with a different perspective. If Jesus were to walk into the room right now and ask us get up from our seats and follow, I'm guessing he'd get a fairly good response. (We have a big advantage.) And yet, when Jesus comes along and calls them, they leave everything they were doing behind and, without hesitation, they follow.

Who is this Jesus? Why would those early disciples give it all up and instantly become his followers? And (more importantly) for us today, why should we respond to that (same calling), more than 2000 years later, to leave it all behind and follow him?

Let me share with you something that happened to me (this past week) and see if you can relate. It happened the other night. I was watching television (the Warriors were on); thought about something I needed in the bedroom, so I got up and walked down there, only to realize (when I got there) that I couldn't remember why I was there.

Now, I knew I didn't just walk there to just (walk there), but once I got there, I couldn't remember why I was there? Do you know what I had to do? (Do you know what I did?) This is a bit embarrassing. I walked back to the room (where the television was), sat down in the same chair (where I was) and tried to rethink what had just happened. I sat there for a few minutes and then I remembered. And so (when I remembered), I got up, went back to the bedroom and grabbed what I had gone there (in the first place) to get. But it didn't happen until I had retraced my original steps and had gone back to where (and to why) it all started.

Do you know what I think happens (in the church) without our even realizing it? Do you know what I think happens when it comes to our faith, and why we do the things we do? I think the same thing happens in the church, (with our faith), as happened to me the other night. (I really do.) I think we end up doing things and going places and busying ourselves (as Christians) with (whatever it is we do) without always (fully remembering) why we're doing what we are.

This series we're in (for these three weeks) is designed to help us remember why we're doing what we are doing, and who this God we follow truly is. And we're doing that, because unless we remember who this God is and (why we're following), then our following can easily lose its meaning and become just another thing we do (among all the things we do)...and that's not what we want to happen.

We started last week with the question, “Who is the Father?” and we began working to pull God out of the packages we have so carefully constructed for him to fit. We talked about the more than 750 ways (in the Bible) in which God is named (or described), and how there is no way we can fully grasp the magnitude of his being. And yet, (we also said) that's exactly why he has revealed himself to us as he has, (in ways we can understand), as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Last week, our focus was on God as our Father. We talked about the relationship we're to have with him. And here I'll give a little plug for our website. (Maybe you already know this.) Every week, we take our sermons and put them online. That way, if you weren't here, then you can still hear (or see) what you missed.

Now, if you weren't here (last week), then I encourage you to go back and check it out. This series is one (upon which) we're going to build; and not just for these three weeks, but throughout the year. It's leading

up to our Vision Sunday at the end of the month and we're going to be coming back to what we're saying (in this series) all year long. If you weren't here, then go back and listen. It's that important.

Last week, it was God the Father. Today it's Jesus as the Son. Who is this Jesus? That's the question we're asking. And why (of all people) should we follow him?

What I want to do (this morning) is to look back on what we're told (about Jesus) in the first four chapters of Matthew's gospel. If we're going to understand the calling we've been given to follow, we need to first understand (and come to know) the one who calls us.

All of this revolves around one sentence. Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." I want to focus (today) not so much on what it means (for us) to follow, but rather on who this one we are called to follow actually is. Jesus said, "Follow me." Who is the "me" that we're called to follow?

This is where I want to give you a summary of the first four chapters. (There's an outline in your bulletin, if you want to write some of this down.) Up to this point, (in those first chapters), Matthew has given us a stunning picture of Jesus from a number of different angles. Those first four chapters give us 20 different pictures.

Now, hang with me. (This is a bit different today, but it isn't a 20-point sermon.) We're going to move through these rather quickly. Take a look. Starting in chapter one, verse one: (Matthew says) "This is the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." There are four pictures of Jesus, right there in the first verse.

Number one, (it says) Jesus is the Savior. He is the Savior. That's what the name "Jesus" means. His name means, "The one who will save us from our sins." (Matthew says his name right up front.)

Number two, he is the Messiah. He is Jesus the Christ, the Messiah. The name "Christ" is a title Jesus was given. It means he is the promised one. The one promised throughout the entire Old Testament is now here. That's what Matthew is saying. He is the Messiah.

Number three, Jesus is the son of David. He is the Savior, the Messiah, and the son of David. Being the son of David, means that Jesus is from the kingly line; this goes way back in Old Testament history.

Even further back (in the Old Testament) is the fourth identity of Jesus. Jesus is the son of Abraham. Matthew (in this first verse) takes us all the way back to Genesis and introduces Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel.

Now, what follows (after that first verse) is a genealogy that shows how everyone and everything in the Old Testament pointed forward to Jesus the Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham, which then leads to the fifth picture.

Number five, Jesus is the center of history. Everything in all of history (leading up) pointed forward to Jesus and everything in all of history (ever since) has pointed back to Jesus. He's the center of it all.

You are not at the center of history. I'm not at the center of history. Our generation is not at the center of history, the United States of America is not at the center of history. Throughout history, billions of people have come and billions of people have gone. Empires have come and gone. Countries, nations, kings, queens, presidents, dictators, all kinds of rulers have all come and gone; at the center of it all, one man remains. His name is Jesus and he is the center of all history. That is all in the first half of Matthew, chapter one.

In the second half, you find his virgin birth and the sixth and seventh pictures of Jesus. Number six, Jesus is fully human. Number seven, he is fully divine. Jesus was fully human (when he came to this earth) and fully divine when he was born into the world; born of the Spirit (the Bible says) through a woman, unlike anyone else ever born. It was the incarnation, the most extraordinary miracle in the entire Bible. God (the one who is divine) became human, one of us.

Now, stop for a minute, and just think it. In the first chapter of Matthew (alone), Jesus is pictured as the Savior, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham, the center of all of history, fully human, and fully God; and we're only one chapter in. (And it keeps going.)

In chapter two, we find picture number eight. Jesus is the sovereign over the wise. He is the sovereign over the wise. He is the Ruler. It says Magi from the east came looking for a king and what do they do? They bow at his crib. These wise men (who traveled hundreds of miles) bow to baby Jesus. Jesus is sovereign over the wise.

Number nine, Jesus is the shepherd of the weak. In this same chapter, Matthew quotes from Micah to show how God will rule his people through Jesus as their shepherd. Just think about it. The sovereign over the wise is the shepherd of the weak. That's something that will preach.

Then, in the tenth picture (still with me?) the Old Testament imagery gets even richer. Jesus (in this life) inaugurates a new Exodus. His family (as a result of King Herod) has to escape to Egypt. The imagery is clear as God brings his Son, Jesus, intentionally into Egypt, and then leads him (in the same way) out of Egypt. There's a picture of the rescue and the redemption Jesus is going to bring. He is inaugurating a new Exodus.

Number eleven, Jesus is the end. It says he will end the mournful exile; he will end our exile. In Matthew 2, you see how God, in the coming of Christ, promises to these weeping women in Bethlehem, who have lost their baby boys, that an end to their exile is coming, the very same picture we find in the Old Testament. It's all found in Jesus.

And then, number twelve, in the middle of all of it, Jesus loves his fiercest enemies. You finish Matthew two, and you realize that Jesus has come (into this world) for the very purpose of saving (the ones) who seek to kill him. He loves his fiercest enemies. He loves sinners like you and me. All of that is in chapter two.

Then, in chapter three, we find four more pictures of Jesus. (Stick with it.) Number thirteen, Jesus is the Savior King. He's the Savior King. John the Baptist declares, "The king is coming and he's coming to save all who repent and believe in him." He's the Savior King. But he's not just the Savior King.

Number fourteen, Jesus is the righteous judge. John says he's coming with a "winnowing fork in his hand and he will separate the grain from the chaff and all who do not repent of sin and believe in him will be burned with unquenchable fire." (That's quite the picture.) He is the righteous judge.

Then, after that, we find John baptizing Jesus, and we're given this rare glimpse into heaven where we see two more pictures. Number fifteen, Jesus is filled with God the Spirit. The Spirit of God is resting on him. So, Jesus is God (and man), filled with the Spirit.

And then, number sixteen, Jesus is loved by God the Father. (You remember the story.) God's voice booms from heaven saying, "This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well-pleased." (That had never happened before.) It's incredible!

All of that, leading up to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, sets the stage for his temptation (in Matthew 4), where we discover the seventeenth picture; Jesus is the new Adam. He's the new Adam, meaning that where the first Adam fell to temptation from the devil, Jesus stood. Jesus (in his life) did what no one else in history has ever done or will ever do. He resisted temptation fully, not once did he give into sin. He is the new Adam.

Number eighteen, Jesus is the true Israel, (the true Israel), meaning that Jesus is the faithful. That's why, when tempted by the devil, we see him quoting from Deuteronomy 6 and 8. He's the faithful and obedient Son who passed the test of temptation in the desert, where Israel before could not do that. He's the true Israel.

Then, number nineteen, we see Matthew quoting from Isaiah. He says, "Jesus is the light of the world." (He's the light of the world.) What Isaiah prophesied (hundreds of years before) has now come true. "The people (living in darkness) have seen a great light."

All of that leading to number twenty; (number nineteen, Jesus is the light of the world); number twenty, he is the hope of all the nations. The hope of all the nations; it's Galilee of the Gentiles (Matthew says); the ones to whom Christ first reveals himself are not the Jews, but to all the nations of the world – to us! (And that's all in the first four chapters.)

And so, (all of that to say), and that's a lot, that when you finally get to Matthew, chapter four (and this is where this all leads), verse eighteen, and you read how Jesus says to these four fishermen, "Follow me," you begin to realize who this Jesus is and why (those first followers) were so willing to leave it all behind and follow.

This is not just the story of another man. This is not just another teacher (of that day) for the people to consider. This is Jesus, the Savior and Messiah. The one promised from the kingly line of David and Abraham, the father of God's chosen people Israel. He is fully human and fully divine. He's the one to whom wise men from the nations bow, the one whose birth ushers in the fulfillment of generations and generations of prophecy and expectation. He is the Savior, the King, the righteous judge of the world, perfectly filled with God the Spirit, completely loved by God the Father, the only man who has conquered sin, the true Son that Israel could never be, the Light of the world, and the Hope for all nations.

Do we realize (and understand) who this is? Do we remember (as we go through the motions of our faith) the magnitude of the One who has called us, just like he called Peter and Andrew, James and John? If we do, we can only come to one conclusion. This Jesus is clearly, absolutely, without question worthy of more than our nominal adherence and our church association. (That's not what this is about.)

We must not, we should not, we cannot reduce this Jesus to a poor, puny Savior who is begging people to accept them into their hearts, as if Jesus needed to be accepted by us. Jesus doesn't need your acceptance. He doesn't need my acceptance. He doesn't need any of our acceptance. He's worthy of all glory in the entire universe, and he doesn't need us at all. We need him. We desperately need him.

Don't turn this around. Don't patronize Jesus. He is worthy of more than a passing connection and casual commitment. Jesus is worthy of nothing less than the total abandonment and supreme adoration of our lives. (This is no game.) We're talking about the Savior King of the universe and the righteous judge of the nations. This is God in the flesh saying (to you and to me) and to us, "Follow me."

The thought alone is baffling, mind-boggling, that Jesus comes to you and me and says, "Follow me." There's no potential (here) for a casual response. (There really isn't.) It's either, turn and run (from this one who is your God), or bow and worship the one who deserves it all. There is no other choice; no other choice.

Read through the story and it all fits. Everything would be different in the lives of those fishermen because of their encounter with Jesus. Everything! Nothing is the same when you come to know (and realize) who this Jesus actually is. And it hasn't changed.

That's why (even today) when people profess to be Christians (followers of Jesus) but their lives look just like the rest of the world, they are deceived. (They really are.) It doesn't matter what they've done. (It's not about us.)

All kinds of people who have supposedly made a decision, prayed a prayer, signed a card, walked an aisle, accepted Jesus into their hearts, but their lives don't look any different. They say they're Christian, but the reality is they don't know this Christ.

Now, I don't want to put limits on how God can work. (God works in mysterious ways.) Nor do I want to give the impression that those things (I just mentioned) don't matter. We all start somewhere, and they do. But there is no middle ground when it comes to Jesus. Because when it comes to Jesus, (you know this Christ), everything begins to change in your life. Everything begins to change.

Now, maybe this sounds challenging (here today), and maybe a bit harsh. I don't know, but it's the truth. Nothing is the same when you know Jesus. Everything changes when you understand Christ.

I heard one preacher put it this way. He said, "Imagine I got here late this morning. Imagine we just finished our readings, it was time for the sermon, and I wasn't there. Five minutes go by, 10 minutes go by. You're just sitting there and it's awkward. And then, all of the sudden, I come running in (and say), "I'm sorry I'm late. I'm out of breath. I was coming here today, driving on the freeway, and I got a flat tire, and so I got out to fix it, but (when I got out to fix it), I accidentally stepped out into the middle of the road and this Mack truck hit me head on. (And it hurt.) But I got up, finished fixing the tire, and got back in and drove. So, I apologize for being late."

Now, if this were the story I told you, you would know one of two things was true. Either number one, I'm lying to you. (You'd never believe it.) It couldn't have happened. (There's no way.) Or, number two, I am very deceived. (I'm very deceived.) It would have to be one of the two. And you'd know that, because when a Mack truck hits somebody, they look different than they did before.

It's the same thing. (It's no different.) Based on that same reality, I'm pretty sure I'm on safe ground in saying that when a person comes face to face with God in the flesh, the Savior King and Sovereign Lord (of the universe), and he reaches down into your heart and saves you from your sin and yourself, you're going to look different. You're going to look completely different. Everything changes when you follow this King. Nothing is the same when you understand (and remember) who this Jesus is. Nothing is the same.

Now, I realize (here this morning), in this series, there's a lot going on in what we've shared. Don't miss the point that Jesus loves you (and loved you) all the way to the cross. That's how great his love for you was and will always be...all the way to the cross.

But don't miss the point, either, that following this Jesus is something you cannot fit into your life where and when and how you choose. (You cannot do that.) Now, you can do that. (Sure you can.) A lot of people do,

(myself included), more than I'd care to admit. On differing levels, we're all guilty and we all need a Savior. And we have one. His name is Jesus. Don't miss the point.

But if our goal is to follow, and if (in following) we are seeking to be disciples of this One who is the Christ, who calls out to us today to "Follow me," then we need to be sure that we remember who this "Me" we are called to follow actually is.

Whatever it takes: walk back into the room where it first started. Go back to where that call first became real in your life. But don't forget why we're here. It's either run and hide, or bow down and worship. Your whole life; everything changes when you know Jesus. Nothing is the same when you know Christ. Amen.