

The Job Offer

Mark 1:14-20 (NIV84)

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" ¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John are doing another day's work: mending nets, casting them, making sure that the boats are holding up, getting the day's catch ready for market. Jesus walks by and says, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." (verse 17) Jesus out of nowhere offers them a job.

I don't know about you, but I immediately put myself in their place wondering what would I do if I were one of those four men. Jesus is offering me a job. You've piqued my interest, Jesus. Let's talk terms. What's the compensation? Am I hourly or salary? What are my health insurance benefits? 401k? Pension? Will I be able to move up? Are there areas for expansion? Is this a stable job? What do I get for following you? I want to sit down and estimate the cost.

Isn't that what any of us do when we have a job and then get another job offer? Am I ridiculous to ask through a series of questions like that with Jesus' job offer, or am I simply doing what Jesus himself said later on in the gospel of Luke: "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?" (Luke 14:28) Shouldn't I ask these questions in order to sit down and estimate whether or not I should take Jesus up on such a job offer?

Can you imagine how that scene of Jesus walking beside the Sea of Galilee calling Simon, Andrew, James, and John would have turned out if those kinds of questions had been their responses? You are left wondering if maybe some of that did happen – just not from the mouths of those four. What about Zebedee, the father of James and John, and most likely the owner of a good chunk of that family fishing business. Was he asking his sons, "Are you just leaving? Who will mend the nets? Who will see to the boats? Who will keep charge of the hired men? Who will make sure that our fish get to the market? Are you leaving me?" These seem to be the responsible, mature questions to sit down and measure out the costs. Weigh your options. What are the pros and cons?

What was the cost for Simon, Andrew, James, and John to leave everything and take up Jesus on his job offer to follow him and be fishers of men? They themselves were giving up their current jobs, which we are assuming paid the bills and provided for their respective families. They know this trade. They are good at it. It's pretty much a family business. So, by leaving, they were giving up a secure job, one that they were all probably working towards taking over one day. They were giving up a known quantity for this job that they had never done before, didn't know how it would work, didn't know where exactly it would lead.

That's the job side of things, but did you think about how this would affect their families? Now, we don't know exactly what all their family situations were like, if they were living at home, dating, married, whatever. We do know, though, that Simon was married. In a few short verses after our reading today we hear that Simon has a mother-in-law. (Mark 1:30) What do you think Simon Peter's wife would have said when he came home that day? "Hi, honey. I quit my job today. I'm going to follow Jesus and be a fisher of men." Would Peter's wife respond first simply by asking, "You did what?! Wait, who? Who are you following? What's a fisher of men? How much does it pay? Will it cover the mortgage? Will it put food on the table? Will it take care of our children? Will you still be able to provide for our family? Let's sit down and estimate the cost and see if we can actually do this." Could you blame Peter's wife if she reacted this way? There is a huge cost of giving up what you know to take Jesus' job offer of following him and being a fisher of men.

I've had the privilege of getting to know men, now pastors, who did pretty much what Peter did. They left lucrative careers to be pastors. We call them second career guys. They've had one career, and many were succeeding at that career, but now they want to take Jesus up on the job offer of being fishers of men. Many of these guys had an established family life, and I wonder how those initial conversations went down. I don't know of any who quit their jobs immediately, but all of them had that discussion - sitting down and estimating the cost. They would have to give up their job. They would have to move. He would be back in school without a full-time salary, paying tuition, studying when he's home. It was going to cost them and their family for him to follow Jesus and be a fisher of men.

Not even talking about entering into the pastoral ministry full time as a second career pastor, what's the cost for you to follow Jesus? For some - maybe many - of you, the cost of following Jesus was not monetary, but relational. While you went to church, your spouse refused to go with you – either defiantly or apathetically. When you started coming here, starting taking the adult confirmation class, did it cost you part of the relationship you had with your family? Did they express to you their disappointment that you have wandered away from the family's faith? Do they still throw in that subtle barbed verbal jab that they wish their grandkids would be growing up in their church, not in your church? Did some of your friends distance themselves from you once you started following Jesus and talking about him? Did you lose their respect because now you buy into that Jesus stuff?

There's more cost, though, for taking Jesus up on his job offer to follow him. It's summed up in just one word of what Jesus was going around proclaiming in Galilee, "Repent...!" (verse 15) Repent. Following Jesus is going to cost you a change in mindset. No longer can those "oops's" and "mistakes" continue as if they are no big deal. You have to pay the price of recognizing your sins, your short-comings, and what you are going to do to change it. You have to pay the price of humility as you trust not in yourself to fix it and change it, but asking God to do it for you because he is the only one who can. You ask him to give you a different attitude concerning what you do, how you talk, how you even think.

With all these costs, how could we ever leave everything to take Jesus up on his job offer to come follow him? How could we ever do what Simon, Andrew, James, and John did and immediately leave everything to do this? The answer is in the message that Jesus himself was proclaiming, "The kingdom of God is near." (verse 15)

Andrew had already heard what the kingdom of God was. He was one of John the Baptist's disciples who watched as John pointed to Jesus and said, "Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29,36) When Andrew heard John say this, he immediately followed Jesus and spent the whole day with him. The first thing Andrew did after he left Jesus that day was find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah!" (John 1:41) Then he brought Simon to Jesus, and Jesus nicknamed Simon "Peter." Andrew and Simon Peter learned from Jesus that he was bringing the kingdom of God, ushered to them by the Lamb of God who would pay the price to take away the sins of the world.

When you hear the phrase "kingdom of God", maybe you think like me and your first thought is, "The kingdom of God is heaven. That's where he dwells. That must be his kingdom." You and I, we're not wrong, but there's more to it than just heaven - especially as it's tied in with the description of the good news of God that Jesus was proclaiming. Martin Luther explained it this way in the Small Catechism. "God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven." So, yes, the end game is heaven, but God's kingdom has to do with the here and now of our lives.

When Jesus said the kingdom of God is near, he was talking about God ruling in our lives. He does this by his Word. It is through that message, the same one that Simon and Andrew knew, that this Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, that God the Holy Spirit works through to rule in our hearts with his grace and righteousness as he causes us to believe this message. This is not something we do on our own, but it is something that God brings to us. As God rules in our hearts, he then governs and influences our actions. He weighs in with his Word on our daily living and our decisions. He causes us to repent and believe the good news. This is God's kingdom in our lives. This is what Jesus offers to all who follow him.

Being good stewards, we sit down and estimate the cost of taking Jesus up on his offer to come, follow him. On the one side, you, like the disciples, may give up job security. You may have to give up certain relationships. You have to give up your sin. But, you gain a kingdom of peace and harmony, ruled by God's grace and righteousness. You receive citizenship in a kingdom that has no defects of flaws or borders than can be breached by evil. You will live with God forever in perfection.

You want to know the compensation and benefit package that Jesus offers? He gives immortality. All health conditions cured. All guilt cast away. All sorrow turned to happiness, all grief to joy. You receive an unbreakable relationship with your God where he will always care for you and rule in your life with his grace and righteousness by which he can never go back on a promise, never try to harm you, never can he leave you. Nothing can compare in price to the kingdom of God that Jesus brings to us.

By Jesus' message, Simon, Andrew, James, and John knew what Jesus was offering. They knew that Jesus himself had left everything to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, their sin. Jesus left everything so that he could call people like Peter, Andrew, James, and John, and you and me, to follow him. Jesus left everything to bring us his kingdom, to rule in our lives with his grace and peace. Because Jesus paid the cost of leaving everything, these four men did not hesitate to leave their jobs at once to follow him.

When the cost of repentance and relationships seems too high, remember that Jesus paid the cost of leaving everything for you and me, left heaven itself so that we could live there, so that we could belong in his kingdom. Repent and believe this good news. Don't hesitate to keep taking him up on his job offer. Come, follow him. Amen.

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