



Instead of just a wishin'. Sermon at WBC - 4.15.18

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Le0n8Eze8Js>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxuOavb_Vy8

Some followers of Christ face up-heaving moves in their lives; it's something all their fellow travelers should remember and aid as best they can. We see a choice example of this in Matthew 4:18-22:

18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

²¹ And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.

²² And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

You see here that Jesus calls on these men to leave their ordinary employments and become his constant attendants where they might continually hear his preaching and see his miracles first hand. That experience would prepare these chosen brethren -- in due time -- to become messengers of the gospel. In speaking of **fishers of men** Christ is referencing the work of ministers.

But notice what followed this call: An immediate departure from their lives, as they then knew them, to follow Christ. And in this story, the departures involved a physical leaving of where they were then living. Such prompt reaction to the call signaled at least these things –

- Sincerity;
- A willingness to forsake all for Christ;
- A willingness to follow Christ wherever he would lead them;
- A casting aside of their fear of the future; and,
- Leaving their comfort levels of employment and family.

Please consider these thoughts from Benson:

Little did they know what awaited them when they left their unmended nets to rot on the beach, and followed the unknown and unhonored Jesus of Nazareth. So we know not what awaits us when

we become his followers; but we should cheerfully go when our Saviour calls, willing to commit all into his hands.

And don't think for a moment these men were living at the poverty level and desperately looking for a way to upgrade their lives. Mark 1:20, for example, gives us a bit more detail: **And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.** The emphasized language suggests the sons of Zebedee (James and John) were, in some measure, of better means and higher social standing than Simon Peter and Andrew. Jamieson-Fausset-Brown believes this added clause from Mark's account shows that that family was in *easy circumstances*.

Ellicott helps capture the point I'm trying to drive home here:

[T]o leave all, to give up the life of home, and its regular occupations, requires, in any case, an effort more or less heroic; and beyond it there lay the future, as yet undiscerned, with all its possible trials and sufferings, to which, by that one act, they pledged themselves.

Now, we have many in this church who have, to one extent or another, done similarly to these four disciples we have been reading of. Here in this body are people who have uprooted their long-lived lives; some are younger, which likely made that experience a bit easier to endure, but it was still a hardship. Some are older, which doubtless made it harder; they have literally abandoned locales where they have spent their entire adult lives. Most have traveled many hundreds – and even thousands – of miles to join this flock of slaughter. All have left family, employment and familiar surroundings. Each such instance is an amazing work of God, and we need to recognize it as such and be very

thankful for it! And when I say “we”, I don’t just mean those of us in this church that were here when these folks arrived, but I include in the “we” those very folks themselves. And here’s why I say that.

Consider Matthew 19:27-30:

27 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

30 But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

Is that not a good bargain for which we each should be most grateful? Peter argues his case; he has forsaken everything to follow Christ. While that’s probably a bit of hyperbole on Peter’s part, as he was inclined to do, his point was well made and he obviously felt it down deep. But the pay-off is sweet:

- A future judgeship when the judging means something;
- A hundredfold return on the investment that a Wall Street veteran would envy, both as to property and family;
- **Everlasting life**; and,

- A reasonable shot at **first**.

The first three of this listing of four are fairly self-explanatory, but what means the last? Again, the text: **But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.** This reads suspiciously like Matthew 20:16, which is the concluding verse of the parable of the vineyard workers: **So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.**

Some say this has to do with the Jews *vis-à-vis* the Gentiles; that is to say, the Jews who originally were nearest the kingdom of heaven shall not hold that position whereas the Gentiles, who were looked upon as being remote from that kingdom shall be admitted into it.

Matthew Poole says this:

For many that are first in profession, first in the opinion of others, first in their own opinion and confidence, at the day of judgment will be found to be last in mine and my Father's esteem and reckoning: and many who make not so great a noise, nor have so great a name and repute in the world, and who have the lowest and meanest opinion of themselves, will be found first, and highest in my favour.

Finally, perhaps these remarks from Ellicott as to Matthew 20:16 (the verse comparable to our text) will help a bit:

This, then, is the great lesson of the parable [of the vineyard workers], and it answers at once the question whether we are to see in it the doctrine of an absolute equality in the blessedness of the life to come. There also there will be some first, some last, but the difference of degree will depend, not on the duration of service, nor even on the amount of work done, but on the temper and character of the worker.

But such sacrificing behavior as we explore today is a sign of a true follower of God, and it has a long history. To prove that point, let's return to the "faith" hall of fame in Hebrews 11 beginning at verse 8 and going through verse 10: **By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.**

And who called Abraham to go out of his home country? Stephen tells us it was **The God of Glory** who **appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.** (Acts 7:2, 3). Genesis 12:1 informs us it was **the Lord** that **said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.** Does that not sound strikingly similar to what Jesus said to Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John thousands of years later? Like them, Abraham obeyed by uprooting himself and following God, believing the accompanying promise: **And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing[.]** (Genesis 12:2).

There were many beneficial reasons for this move on Abraham's part, all of which would apply equally today. We get a flavor of those reasons from these remarks by Benson:

We have here the call whereby Abram was removed from, the land of his nativity into the land of promise. This call was designed both to try his faith and obedience, and also to set him and his family apart for God, in order that the universal prevalence of idolatry might be prevented, and a remnant reserved for God, among whom his true worship might be maintained, his oracles preserved, and his ordinances established till the coming of the Messiah. God seems also, by sending him into Canaan, a country given up to the most gross, cruel, and barbarous idolatry, even the sacrificing of their own children to their idols, to have intended that he, and the other patriarchs descended from him, should be witnesses for God to these nations before their destruction; which is the plan God has generally, if not always, pursued; seldom, if ever, destroying a people for their wickedness, till he has sent his truth, in one form or another, and his witnesses among them.

Ruth is another ensample. Naomi and Ruth got up and moved and made their way to the land where **the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.** (Ruth 1:6). In two short verses, we are told of the circumstances of Ruth's trip and her resulting rewards. **And Boaz answered and said unto her (Ruth), It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.** (Ruth 2:11, 12). What followed for Ruth was a life filled with many unique blessings, including specially

she became a part of the Messianic line. (Ruth 4:13-22; Matthew 1:5 - **Boaz begat Obed of Ruth**).

Now, I have previously suggested those in this church would be right in recognizing the traumas and challenges our members who have gone through these “get thee out of thy country” experiences, and offer encouragements and helps. There are many ways of doing so, including a variety of ways we have not thought of, so far. Some ways we have thought of: Helping with settling in (housing, jobs, etc.), spiritual encouragement, quality time in the scriptures, and so on. We have a good listing from Matthew Chapter 25: Feeding the hungry; drink for the thirsty; housing for the stranger; clothing for the naked; and, visits for the sick and those in prison. **And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.** (Matthew 25:40).

Perhaps another way is to remind them early and often of the many practical, day-to-day benefits that move results in, such as those highlighted in the Benson quote above. (In truth, all of these benefits inure to each one of us when you include in the equation those who have lost kindred and various types of property, all of which are included in these passages of scripture).

I might also say encouragement can be found in reminding our fellow travelers that the sacrifices they have made are not as bad as one might think, it all being relative, so let’s rejoice in our current

circumstances when we stack them up against some of our forefathers. In addition to the many samples of trying lives that we read of in the Bible, I offer for your consideration the following narrative from William Bradford's *The Decimation and Survival of Plymouth Colony* regarding the hardships faced by the young colony of Puritans who fled England, first to Holland then on to the New World in 1620:

Being thus arrived in a good harbor, and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of Heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, and delivered them from all the perils and miseries thereof, again to set their feet on the firm and stable earth, their proper element. And no marvel if they were thus joyful, seeing wise Seneca was so affected with sailing a few miles on the coast of his own Italy, as he affirmed, that he had rather remain twenty years on his way by land than pass by sea to any place in a short time, so tedious and dreadful was the same unto him.

But here I cannot but stay and make a pause, and stand half amazed at this poor people's present condition; and so I think will the reader, too, when he well considers the same. Being thus passed the vast ocean, and a sea of troubles before in their preparation (as may be remembered by that which went before), they had now no friends to welcome them nor inns to entertain or refresh their weatherbeaten bodies; no houses or much less town to repair to, to seek for succour. It is recorded in Scripture as a mercy to the Apostle and his shipwrecked company, that the barbarians showed them no small kindness in refreshing them, but these savage barbarians, when they met with them (as after will appear) were readier to fill their sides full of arrows than otherwise. And for the season it was winter, and they that know the winters of that country know them to be sharp and violent, and subject to cruel and fierce storms, dangerous to travel to known places, much more to search an unknown coast. Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full [sic] of wild beasts and wild men—and what multitudes there

*might be of them they knew not. Neither could they, as it were, go up to the top of Pisgah to view from this wilderness a more goodly country to feed their hopes; for which way soever they turned their eyes (save upward to the heavens) they could have little solace or content in respect of any outward objects. For summer being done, all things stand upon them with a weatherbeaten face, and the whole country, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage hue. If they looked behind them, there was the mighty ocean which they had passed and was now as a main bar and gulf to separate them from all the civil parts of the world. * * * * It is true, indeed, the affections and love of their brethren at Leyden was cordial and entire towards them, but they had little power to help them or themselves. . . .*

What could now sustain them but the Spirit of God and His grace? May not and ought not the children of these fathers rightly say: "Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto the Lord, and He heard their voice and looked on their adversity," etc. "Let them therefore praise the Lord, because He is good: and His mercies endure forever." "Yea, let them which have been redeemed of the Lord, shew how He hath delivered them from the hand of the oppressor. When they wandered in the desert wilderness out of the way, and found no city to dwell in, both hungry and thirsty, their soul was overwhelmed in them. Let them confess before the Lord His loving-kindness and His wonderful works before the sons of men."

Kings of the East:

We see much in the news these days of China, North Korea, Japan, and other nations in that part of the world. For years, China has been having America for breakfast, lunch and dinner when it comes to trade. The gap between Chinese goods imported to the United States and American goods exported to China rose to \$375.2 billion last year, up from \$347 billion the prior year. For more on

that matter take a look at this recent New York Times article: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/06/us/politics/us-china-trade-deficit.html> While China owns America's largest trade deficit, Japan comes in second. See, for example, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/06/us/politics/us-china-trade-deficit.html>.

Almost daily we hear of North Korea's growing nuclear threat to America and the world. By far, that situation has been the largest foreign affairs issue the Trump administration has faced.

But what's really unique these days in that part of the world is the cooperation going on between those countries. For centuries, the Asian countries have been at vicious war with each other. Examples include –

- Korean War that began in 1950 and still has not been officially ended since no peace treaty has been signed between North and South Korea. This war caused over 3 million deaths, when civilian casualties are counted.
- The so-called Sino-Japanese War, involving the Japanese military invading China during World War II. While this war is little-known in this country, it lasted from 1937 to 1945 and featured unbelievable atrocities. China numbered casualties of this war, both military and non-military, at 35 million. If you interested in reading more, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Sino-Japanese_War#Casualties_assessment.

But now we see these countries cooperating at the highest levels. Just recently, the leader of North Korea surreptitiously met with

China's president, and Japan's Prime Minister has had secret discussions with North Korea's Kim Jong-un. Almost as surprising, in early March, 2018 Kim Jong-un hosted a high-level political delegation from South Korea.

I offer the following verses for your consideration against this dramatic backdrop:

For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. (Matthew 24:27)

Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia[.] (Acts 16:6) Think of the impact on this part of the world that Paul and Timothy were stopped from preaching there. Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism constitute the three intertwined religious systems that have shaped Chinese culture. Japan is dominated by Shinto and Buddhism. North Korea religions are Korean shamanism and Hinduism. Etc.

And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. (Revelation 16:12) Note this language suggests great cooperation between the "kings of the east"; they are here acting in concert, which suggests no infighting whatsoever.

I love you. Amen!