

THE RADICAL RABBI: "A RADICAL CREW"

(Matthew 4:13-16; Luke 5:1-11)

8.16.20

INTRODUCTION

Hundreds of thousands of dollars. Or, how 'bout millions of dollars? That's the brackets we get into when we talk about how much money colleges and universities pay for recruiting the best high school athletes to play for their schools. Hundreds of thousands equal what the biggest schools pay to get the best basketball players to commit to their schools. And millions of dollars is what is being spent by many colleges and universities to get the best football players to sign on to their schools.

At one level, it's relatively easy to justify that kind of money. In theory, having the best players gives you a chance to have the best team. And having the best team makes the most money. And money is what pays for the best athletic facilities, the best training facilities, the best coaches, and so on. "And the beat goes on" - almost to the point that it's easy to forget that we are talking about institutions of higher "learning," not "earning."

Well today we're going to be talking about another Recruiter - and how He redefined what being the "best" actually meant. But before we get into it, let's begin with a **word of prayer**.

TEXTS

Leaving Nazareth, [Jesus] went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali - to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" - Matthew 4:13-16 (quoting Isaiah 9:1-2).

Capernaum was on the NW shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was a far bigger town (a population of approximately 1,500 when Christ moved there) than was Nazareth (thought to have had a population of about 400 during Christ's lifetime) and, due to its location immediately on the lake, it was a commercial center as well due to the revenue from fishing. Fishing, in fact, was a huge presence during the first century; the first-century Jewish historian Josephus mentions that as many as 330 boats would have been fishing the waters of the northern part of the Sea of Galilee, so it should come as no surprise that many of Christ's first disciples came from a fishing background. There was also a permanent tax office located there, it was the home of a royal official (already mentioned due to Christ's "second sign" of healing that man's son while still in Cana), and it was also permanently garrisoned by a detachment of Roman soldiers (possibly as a consequence of the permanent tax office). All in all, this was going to be a much more visible setting for Christ's ministry than would Nazareth, with great opportunities to plant seeds for the kingdom from there all the way to Rome.

Now the "Matthew" that is writing this account is the same guy that became a disciple of Jesus. The target audience he was addressing was a Jewish audience so, to make his case that Jesus was, in fact, the long-promised, long-awaited Messiah, he made multiple connections between the life of his "radical rabbi" and the prophecies of Scripture to assert that Jesus of Nazareth was God's anointed one. No other gospel author quoted more OT scriptures than did Matthew. That said, he is doing that here, using scripture from the prophet Isaiah to make the point that it was predicted 700 years before the event that this part of Israel - the allotments of Promised Land made to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali - would see "a great light," an

allusion to the spiritual light that Jesus would bring to a spiritually dark place, time and people. The province of Galilee and the towns surrounding the Sea of Galilee - particularly Capernaum, Cana, and Nazareth - would be the eyewitnesses of this impact even as they stumbled endlessly in spiritual darkness.

Now one reason that Isaiah referred to this area as "the land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali" is because, when he wrote some 700 years before the time of Christ, even some 200 years before Rome became as much as a republic, there was no such thing as Galilee - at least not in terms of a fixed region. This was done by Roman governing authorities who created an administrative district named "Galilee" in 63 BC. But this area, made up of some 204 villages and towns, was the scene of most of the events recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Fully 25 of Christ's 33 recorded miracles took place in front of a Galilean audience, and most of His parables were shared here as well. No wonder Matthew connected Isaiah's prophecy to Christ's ministry here.

Isaiah's mentioning the "Way of the Sea" refers to a highly-traveled, well-known commercial trade route that carried merchants and traders from Damascus in Syria all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. And then Isaiah mentions another interesting phrase: "Galilee of the Gentiles." Since the eighth century BC (or, put another way, ever since the Assyrian invasion and exile of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC), Galilee had had proportionately more Gentile residents than its southern neighbor Judea had; in fact, Jewish residents were in the minority at the time of Christ. What a perfect setting for a life and ministry from which, in God's own words, ***all peoples on earth will be blessed - Genesis 12:3b.***

And of course, what lays behind Matthew's reference to a 700-year-old Scripture is the undeniable truth that, as in everything else, God is completely in charge - setting His timeframes, arranging all the "dominoes" of people, places and things that converge in just the right way to bring about the fulfillment that is assured by the simple fact that God has been and always will be the master conductor of everything that is happening on earth. A verse we have used many times is so appropriate here as it describes in God's own words exactly what he does: ***"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'"*** [And then He continues, applying who He is and how He works specifically to His long-promised plan of salvation.] ***... I am bringing My righteousness near, it is not far away; and My salvation will not be delayed" - God speaking, Isaiah 46:10, 13a.*** So, a spiritual light, shining brighter than anything else in human history, uniquely illuminating this part of the world? He told it to Isaiah seven centuries before so that, when it happened, nobody should be surprised.

And now, on to the rest of the story, courtesy of the gospel of Luke:

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around Him and listening to the word of God - Luke 5:1.

The Sea of Galilee measures 13 miles long and approximately 8 miles wide at its widest point. It is the lowest freshwater lake on earth. Depths of up to 150 feet have been measured. Just as a point of comparison, Lake Mille Lacs in Minnesota is 14 miles wide at its widest point and 18 miles long at its greatest length, but its greatest depth is only 42 feet. Now this Galilean body of water is called by a variety of names: Sea of Kinnereth (or Chinnereth, both the Hebrew term) in Joshua 12, Sea of Galilee in Matthew 4 and Mark 1, Lake of Gennesaret here

in Luke 5 (the Greek translation of "Chinnereth"), and the Sea of Tiberias in John 6 and 21. Sometimes it was simply called "the lake" or "the sea."

Now we can only imagine this from our present-day vantage point, but Jesus must have had an incredibly welcoming, even magnetic, presence that caused people to want to be as close to Him as possible. I mean, think about it: Almighty God, made not only tangible human flesh, but approachable and touchable as well. He came to us to be with us, to be immediate to us. He was never aloof or distant but came to be approached, to be touched. Now certainly the opportunity for healing would have caused people to flock to Him, but we know that simply being in His hearing, in the presence of His ministering words, also drew people to want to be as close to Him as possible. In other places, the Greek creates the picture of people literally hanging on Jesus like an oversized coat. For those who sought him out, for whatever reason, there seems to have been no such thing as being "too close." This was one of those times where the press of the crowd has pushed Him quite literally to the water's edge.

And then Luke writes something incredible: ***[T]he people were crowding around Him and listening to the word of God - Luke 5:1b.*** That must have been something simply awesome to witness. You know, it may sometimes seem hard to believe in this era of video gaming and Hollywood blockbusters but, once upon a time, people would throng to theaters and other meeting places - to be read to. Charles Dickens made a tour of America in 1867-68. His act? Reading selections from his stories, "A Christmas Carol" and "The Pickwick Papers" to his audiences. How many performances? 76! But that wasn't just for a society that moved at a slower pace. Even in our time, British author J.K. Rowling held a London theater filled with her young fans spellbound - and in absolute silence - while she read the opening chapter to her final Harry Potter novel, "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hollows," in 2007.

Just like in those experiences, only probably like a gazillion times more impacting, we have another Author sharing His "book" to this audience gathered along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. His book? "The Word of God." Try and imagine what that must have been like - to actually have the author of God's word speaking God's word! And, while not necessarily presented for that purpose, it is another clear declaration of His divinity that this rabbi speaking God's word is in fact the Author of God's word! It would have been an act of blasphemy to teach God's word as Christ did without actually being the Author He claimed to be.

He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then He sat down and taught the people from the boat - Luke 5:2-3.

Jesus once declared: ***"[T]he Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" - Jesus Christ, Mark 10:45a.*** And the apostle Paul made note of that attitude, telling the Philippian church that Christ Jesus had ***made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant" - Paul, Philippians 2:7a.*** This is what the idea of "servant" looked like; it's both incredibly subtle and screaming loud all at the same time! Go back to verse one for a second where it says that ***the people were crowding around Him and listening to the word of God - Luke 5:1b.*** Look how Jesus responds to that situation: He doesn't tell the crowd to "Back off" or "Gimme some space" or anything else. He doesn't make them accommodate Him. He accommodates them. He lets them be the crowd they are, trying to be as close to Him as

possible. He makes the adjustment; He basically asks Simon if it's OK to borrow his boat for a bit and, if OK, could he push out from the shore just a bit so that He could continue His teaching. And that's another picture of His humility: He asks Simon if he could push his boat out from shore a little bit just to help this teaching moment. What is it David said: ***The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it - David, Psalm 24:1.*** This is a wonderful picture of Jesus showing the incredible strength of His humility - His willingness to serve us to connect with us, all for the sake of our salvation. Wow!

Now we have some idea of the size of the boats that were sitting there while Jesus spoke to the crowd due to the unearthing of a boat in 1986 that was dated to the approximate time of Christ, at least to the first century AD. It is considered to be a good representation of the size of boat that was likely fishing the waters of the lake during Christ's time. Some biblical scholars have done some calculations (based on the best assumptions they can find) to figure out some useful dimensions for this story. The boat found back in 1986 measured 27 feet long, 7.5 feet wide and just about 4.5 feet deep. Using the parameters of cedar as the likely material used in building the boat, a vessel such as Peter and his partners were using would have weighed in at just over 1,300 lbs. An estimation of the average Israelite adult male at that time would be approximately 160 lbs., and a rough estimate of the weight of a typically sized net would be about 155 lbs. And maneuvering that size of boat and working that heavy a net would have been something that was done basically year-round, no matter how hot the summer or cold the winter or lousy the weather. These guys were studs!

When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets" - Luke 5:4-5.

So, the lesson now finished, He directs Simon to put his boat out into deeper water. Why? For the purpose of letting down the nets. Why? For a catch of fish. This must have been just the least bit frustrating for Simon to hear, and likely the last thing he would have even begun to consider doing with his time. First of all, he and his fishing partners had been out all night trying to catch fish - and come up empty. The idea was fishing during the night, and then selling your catch at market the next day. Considering that nighttime was the best time to fish, why would they want to go out now, in the middle of the day? And considering that the shallows were the best place to catch fish, why should they want to go out into the deeper parts of the lake? Second, even after that tiring shift, they still had had to put in all the effort to repair, wash and clean, and then dry their nets - that effort alone teasing them about their lack of any fish caught the previous night - but it was something that had to be done or they would risk their nets rotting and breaking. Ultimately, they were dead-dog tired. And third, if they had picked up any info on this rabbi's background, part of His resume would have read: "carpenter's son," not "fisherman's son." Simon wouldn't have dared tell Him how to build a kitchen table. How could He presume to tell Simon when and where to fish?

But there was something about this guy that Simon had been trying to figure out ever since the first time his brother Andrew had introduced him. What it was, he wasn't quite sure but, answering with a polite "Master," meaning Simon's recognition of authority in this guy, even some kind of command presence, he does what Jesus asks and, in a moment, they are heading out for deeper waters. And even though it must have pained him to think of all the hard labor on cleaning their nets now literally being washed away, he obediently lowered his nets anyway.

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink - Luke 5:6-7.

Quicker than they could say, "There's something fishy going on here," Peter and Andrew were up to their anchors in fish - which kept on coming, to the point that their nets began to break. James and John, their fishing partners, as well as all their assistants, came to join them and soon were joined in trouble, too, as both boats began to sink under the incredible load of all these fish that they suddenly owned. And going back to those biblical scholars, who are also trained mathematicians, they estimated that the weight of the fish required to cause one of these boats to begin to sink would be somewhere on the order of over 31,000 lbs.! That is a lot of "filet-o-fish" sandwiches! And double your pleasure, double your fun - both boats are beginning to go down for the count. How about some 62,000 lbs. of flip-flopping fun?

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, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Him - Luke 5:8-11.

Peter is starting to connect some dots about this Nazarene. Remember that he was in Cana when somehow the best wine ever showed up toward the end of the wedding feast instead of at the beginning. And the way the servants had acted, it seemed that Jesus might have had something to do with that. As a result, they had begun to believe in Him - maybe just superficially, maybe just an initial first impression, but there at least seemed to be something about this guy that seemed to justify staying connected with Him.

And now this! In Cana that miracle seemed so quiet - people reacting to this fabulous wine, and only later finding out that Jesus may have had something special to do with it. OK, so that was pretty cool! But this moment - there was nothing quiet or secondhand about this moment at all. This miracle they were experiencing, even as it is happening. They could see the miracle, all these fish showing up. They could feel the miracle, the weight of all these fish threatening their nets and even their boats. And Jesus, just sitting there, probably a little hint of smile on His face even as He watched them struggle.

But something more happens - at least for Peter. Jesus is slowly becoming something more than just a rabbi. He has power, genuine power, like nobody he has ever met before. It's almost like He has - Peter hesitates, the words scrambling his brain - like He has the power of God.

And what a curious response Peter seems to make - not a "thank you" for this amazing catch, not even a "wow, I can't believe it." Instead, Peter comes before Jesus and drops to his knees - a sign of humility, and a sign of recognition as an inferior of being in the presence of a superior. And Peter utters words that would have seemed inconceivable to him at any other time in his life: ***"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man" - Peter, Luke 5:8b.*** Remember - just a few short moments before, he had addressed Jesus as "Master." Now, after having experienced His power, Simon addresses Him as "Lord." So, what's happened? Peter is connecting Christ's power with a righteousness far, far beyond his own. Those two somehow seem inseparable. And, all of a sudden, it is his own sin in the presence of such righteousness

that has become acutely embarrassing to him, to the point that he tells Jesus to get away from one such as him. He is beginning to see Jesus in a far more complete context. And the picture frightens him!

That's why the response he hears from Jesus is so appropriate: **"Don't be afraid"** And then, a first call to a purpose, a mission, a ministry, a future way of living that is going to consume him, and his friends, completely: **"[F]rom now on you will fish for people" - Jesus Christ, Luke 5:10b.** And Peter and his friends are so overwhelmed, not just by the invitation, but by the One extending the invitation, that they respond without even having to think about it: They pulled their boats up out of the water, they left absolutely everything there was to leave, and they began a lifetime of following Jesus. When Luke says that they "left everything," that's exactly what he means - the boats, the fish, their work, their families, their homes. And notice that there is no mention of Jesus calling them to "follow Me" as He had before when they initially met. They themselves in this moment chose to follow, inspired by the promise to become one who "fishes for people." The Greek tells us that they "forsook all." An interesting part of the Greek defines "forsook" as to "let go from oneself." In other words, they surrendered all they had for all that Jesus promised. They now belong to Him!

And Jesus, in His abundantly amazing grace, provides a wonderful gift of provision for the families these guys are leaving. This huge catch of fish, literally a catch of a lifetime, will provide a great support of money to live on in the absence of their husbands and fathers - another picture of ***the riches of His glory - Paul, Philippians 4:19b.***

APPLICATION

There are a whole bunch of wonderful pieces to look at as we consider these verses:

- 1) First of all, we see a simply wonderful picture of our wonderful Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The images of "gods" that the ancient world almost unanimously presented were basically nothing more than super-sized human beings, with all the attendant human failings: Anger, envy, revenge, self-centeredness. Along with that, ancient gods were most often unforgiving, childish, and completely unempathetic with human conditions, literally laughing at the struggles of human beings. Contrast that with this picture of Christ: a transparently obvious servant's heart, and a willingness not only to be approached but even to be touched, to be allowed to be immediate with Him. And add to that the love that is the foundation of everything He does and says. Clearly the one true God is a being like none other.
- 2) By choosing these guys as His disciples, Jesus is casting a vision not so much for what they are but what, in time, they can become. And to be honest, they "ain't" much at this moment:
 - a. Peter is a wonderful example of "talk first, think later." His impulsiveness will be a constant source of self-inflicted trouble for him.
 - b. James and John appear to have some serious anger issues, once asking Jesus if he desired that they call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village that rejected him (Luke 9:54). They likely weren't called the "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17) for nothing.
 - c. Thomas struggled with placing his faith in Christ, appearing at times to have never met a doubt he wouldn't buy.
 - d. Philip struggled with seeing Jesus as God incarnate.

- e. Judas had a heart only a thief would appreciate, and a love of money that was worshiped ahead of all else.
- f. All of them struggled with believing that Jesus was who He said He was, often shown by fear ruling their lives instead of faith, and love for self and preservation seeming more important than love for Christ.

But despite all this, Christ's faith is not in they themselves but in what He knows His Holy Spirit can make them.

3. By choosing these guys as His disciples, Jesus was arguably choosing "failures." In ancient Israel, every boy would have had opportunity to study "God Stuff 101." For any boy who was smart enough and showed aptitude, he was invited to further study; Paul would be a great example. For those not showing those qualities, they would have been quietly encouraged to follow their father's career path. Considering most of these guys were doing exactly that, we can assume that, for whatever reason, their first "God Stuff teachers saw nothing whatever to recommend them for further study.
4. And just the fact that Jesus, earning a reputation as a legitimate rabbi, even if a bit radical sometimes, was choosing His disciples was in and of itself quite radical. Traditionally, ancient students chose the teachers they wanted to emulate, and the teachers obliged by taking them under their wing. Not so Jesus - He did the choosing.
5. And what He chose them for was a lifetime - a lifetime of ministry that, for most of them, would lead to death. But they followed - leaving all that they knew and loved behind, for a complete unknown. But what did become known was Jesus and, as they got to know Him better and understand who He was, giving up all for Him became the most natural response they could have. As He Himself said: ***"Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for My sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life"*** - ***Jesus Christ, Matthew 19:29***. He would even go so far as to say: ***"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters - yes, even their own life - such a person cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple"*** - ***Jesus Christ, Luke 14:26-27***. When Jesus talks about anyone who "comes to" Him, the idea is literally a desire to attach themselves to Him. Remember that a disciple is one who is endeavoring to learn to the fullest degree possible through the teaching and the example of Jesus the spirit of Jesus so that, as a disciple, he may most fully be like Jesus. The idea is that, for the Christian, following Christ means a complete reset of old priorities. For family, it is letting go of someone to share them with the family of God.
6. Of the 12 guys who wound up being appointed as apostles, at least seven of them - Peter, Andrew, James, John, Thomas, Philip and Nathanael - were very likely fisherman. Now unlike many of the occupations available to people at that time, fishing was particularly profitable because it was a year-round enterprise versus something seasonal like farming. And one of the benefits of a power like Rome being so present and in charge was the accessibility to markets for their products throughout the known world. But for Jesus, choosing these guys, especially those who were fishermen, was incredibly insightful, because being fishermen meant that:
 - a. They had to be incredibly hard workers; rowing those heavy boats and repeatedly tossing heavy nets that would become even heavier with a good catch

- required great strength and stamina.
- b. They had to be incredibly brave; working the waters of the Sea of Galilee very definitely meant putting yourself in harm's way as the weather could turn quickly, and the storms the lake and its geography generated could be mercilessly fierce.
 - c. They had to be incredibly quick-thinking, as swiftly moving changes in the lake would require them to change just as quickly along with it.
 - d. They had to be incredibly patient, waiting through long hours for a moment's strike of fish, along with a good helping of determination to stay on the lake even when it appeared the fish weren't biting.
 - e. They had to be incredibly team-oriented; they had to work together to make the best use of their nets and be ready to leave what one was doing to immediately help somebody else.
 - f. They had to be incredibly responsible; they couldn't afford short cuts - regarding the nets, they had to be washed and dried and repaired immediately to extend their useful lives; the men themselves had to be ready immediately to prepare any catches they did bring in to shore for market; and their boats and equipment had to be completely ready for the next night's fishing before they could even think of "calling it a day."

And this is the "radical" crew that Jesus brought alongside Him. Not too many recruiters would have been drawn to them but, for Jesus, they were perfect.

CONCLUSION

When Herb Brooks was putting together the 1980 US Olympic hockey team, the US Olympic committee members were very upset with, among other things, that he was not choosing players that they thought would have been perfect for such a team. But Brooks had a plan of how they were going to play the game, and he needed players that he felt fit that plan. As he said in response to the criticism: "I'm not looking for the best players; I'm looking for the right players." The outcome he had in mind dictated his choices.

About 2,000 years before that, Paul had echoed similar thoughts in describing who God had chosen through Christ to be His ambassadors: ***"Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him" - Paul, I Corinthians 1:26b-29.***

Or, as Christ Himself might have said, "I want fishermen, not Pharisees."

Christ has an outcome in mind. So, He is always on the lookout for people who, like these guys, are willing to "leave everything" to follow Him. That's what Christ is looking for: total sellouts to His Lordship, total surrenders to His will, and total slaves to His Kingdom - all the while being willing to embrace the helplessness of our own strength that we may rely in every way on the strength and wisdom and guidance of Jesus. So, are we Pharisees or fisherman? Christ knows what He wants. What do we want? Let's pray!