

## Sabbath School Lesson #2 – The Ministry Begins – 2-8 April 2016

**C**hrist begun His ministry by calling common people, who heard Him gladly, even the fishermen, to be His disciples. “And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). Even today, Jesus calls us to be His disciples.

In the story of Jesus calling His first disciples as He begun His ministry, two things are noticeable: one is the class of men whom Jesus called, and the other is the readiness with which they followed Him. They were not all from one class. One, Matthew, was a rich man; all the others were poor men, in the sense that they had no income except from their daily labour. But whether rich or poor, they were all those who were not held in the highest repute by the proud Pharisees. ‘Good enough men as fishermen, if they would but keep their place, but with no qualifications for teachers or preachers,’ would be the natural comment of the learned rabbis. But Jesus did not choose them for what they were, but for what He could make of them. “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him ... That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). Those whom Christ chose were men who were in a condition to be made over new, so that the new wine of the Gospel could be put into them. They did not feel “increased with goods, and have need of nothing” (Revelation 3:17); and they did not know so much that they were not willing to learn more.

Among all the gifts which God by His own Spirit has placed in the church, we do not find preachers. The Lord has not made any provision for a preaching class. A bishop or elder must be “apt to teach” (2 Timothy 2:24), but nothing is said about his preaching. If most people were asked to name the chief qualification of an elder, they would say, ‘apt to preach’ – No, every Christian is a preacher, whether he knows it or not; he is a preacher by virtue of his existence but to be able to teach, to catch men for the kingdom of God, needs special training by the Spirit of God. So when Christ called Peter and Andrew, He said, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). Not only so, but they were to be made successful fishermen, for He also said, “From henceforth thou shalt catch men” (Luke 5:10).

All the first disciples of Jesus were of the common people. “The common people heard Him gladly” (Mark 12:37). Christ Himself was one of the common people (Psalm 89:19). He was “despised and rejected of men” (Isaiah 53:3). But it is “to Him whom man despiseth,” that God says, “In an acceptable time have I heard Thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped Thee; and I will preserve Thee, and give Thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inhabit the desolate heritages” (Isaiah 49:7-8). Note well that there is only one qualification here: “To Him whom man despiseth.” Jesus was not the only one in the world, who has been despised. How many of us have not felt ourselves having been despised? Indeed, often, we have despised ourselves. Then these words apply to us as well as to Jesus. God has chosen us to be His salvation unto the ends of the earth.

Looking at the issue of being despised of men, and applying it beyond Christ, you may say, ‘we are justly despised, because of our sinfulness, while Jesus was unjustly despised.’ What difference does that make? Note, the text does not say, ‘To him whom man unjustly despiseth,’ but “to him whom man despiseth.” It is unlimited. Wherever there is a poor, despised person on this earth, there is one whom God has chosen to be His messenger of salvation. The only question is, will the despised person acquiesce in the choice?

The fishermen having joined the ministry of Jesus, after three or so years of ministering with Jesus, there was a marked change in those disciples. The learned doctors of theology could indeed see that they were of the common people, and that they lacked the peculiar polish of theological schools, but “they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus,” and they marvelled at their words (Acts 4:13). “Behold, God exalteth by His power; who teacheth like Him?” (Job 36:22). Christ had and still has the learning from everlasting (Proverbs 8:22-30) to impart to all who follow Him. No one who follows Christ need have

occasion to mourn his lack of opportunities. Following Christ is not a substitute for education, but supplies the genuine article, if one is willing to undergo the necessary discipline.

Of the disciples, Matthew was a rich man, engaged in a lucrative business (Luke 5:27-31). Yet as soon as Jesus said to him, "Follow Me," "he left all, rose up, and followed Him." This was written as an example for men to the end of time. It is a very common thing for men to say, 'I will begin to serve the Lord as soon as I can get my business settled;' 'as soon as I can dispose of my business, or as soon as I can pay my debts, or as soon as I can get out of this partnership, I will begin to keep the Sabbath of the Lord.' Matthew made none of these excuses, although he certainly had as much ground for them as anybody ever can have, for he was in Government employment. But the business of the king had to give way for that of the King of kings. When a father calls his son, it does not sound very respectful for the son to answer, 'I will come when I get ready;' yet that is just what many souls virtually say to the Lord. "A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:23).

Excuses, however, are not confined to the rich; the poor are often just as ready to make excuses. Many will say, 'I should lose my situation, if I begun to serve the Lord, keeping all His commandments;' or 'I could not make a living, if I should keep the Sabbath.' How often we hear these words. Peter and Andrew were fishermen, having only their fishing nets and their boats with which to earn a livelihood. Jesus said, "Follow Me;" "And they straightway left their nets, and followed Him" (Matthew 4:20) – type of followers in whom Jesus delights. How often we think, 'If I were only such a man as Peter, or John!' in that case we might do something worthwhile. Well, you can at least begin to be like them. You can be like them in the beginning of their career, and leave it with the Lord as they did, to determine what you shall be afterwards. God will guide you. The first disciples of Jesus were marked by David's characteristic, as David said, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep Thy commandments" (Psalm 119:60). But how strange it is that people seem to take it for granted that all the martyrdom, and the spirit of martyrdom, is relegated to the past, and that now it cannot be expected that they shall inconvenience themselves in the least for the sake of Christ. "Even Christ pleased not Himself" (Romans 15:3), and He still says, "Follow Me!" "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24).

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it" (Luke 9:23-24). "He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:38). Ah, here we have the answer to the oft-repeated complaint, 'I am so unworthy.' When the man makes that complaint, we know what is the trouble. Let him deny himself, be content to be of no reputation, take up his cross, and follow the Lord promptly, instead of hesitating, and dreading it, and the Lord will count him worthy, and will make him of incalculable worth. Just such disciples as those first ones, like those common people, even fishermen, the Lord is still seeking. The question is: Will you be one of them?

Like Philip, each common person can bring a soul to Christ. Nathanael had some doubts, Philip did not waste time arguing with him; "Come and see," was his only answer (John 1:45-46). That is all that is required of any servant of Christ, – to lead men to Him, that they may see Him. Let men see Him, and He will do the rest. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me" (John 12:32). Who is authorised to do this? Whoever "hath heard, and hath learned of the Father" (John 6:45) "as the truth is in Jesus" (Ephesians 4:21), and has come to Him, is commissioned to bring others to Him. "Let him that heareth say, Come" (Revelation 22:17). Let every one take heed not to misrepresent Christ, and be sure that he brings men to the real Christ, and not to himself or to something of his own devising. Happy is the person who can say of a truth, "We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write" (John 1:45). Such a man has an argument that will be sufficient for every doubter, namely, "Come and see." Those who refuse to comply with so reasonable a request, would certainly not listen to anything; and those who having seen Jesus crucified before them, will not believe, cannot be reached by any argument, and so nothing more is needed. You ask, 'how shall I show Jesus to them, if I do not preach to them, and argue with them?' That question reveals the fact that you have not yet found Him. All the most eloquent preacher in the world can do to lead men to Christ, is to tell them how he found Him, and what He has done for him; and the least talented man in the world can do that.