

If we are followers of Jesus then His mission must become our own. His mission was to seek the lost, to engage them and bless them by bringing life to them. Last week we saw how Jesus did that with Matthew. Once He engaged Matthew He invited Himself over to Matthew's house where a party broke out involving Matthew's network of friends. Jesus was comfortable in that setting but the religious leaders were not. They challenged Jesus' disciples wondering why a man who claimed to be sent from God would associate with public sinners who were not part of the organized religious establishment. Jesus took advantage of the opportunity to make it clear that His mission was to seek and to save those who were lost and bring them life.

We have heard some great testimonies this morning from several who engaged somewhere, blessed someone, and said something life giving...This is so simple I asked Brian Powers in our communications department to illustrate the process...watch!

Today I want to identify the next step in our mission to as we recommit ourselves to the mission of Jesus. Once we have engaged what then? Our mission is not simply to go around and do nice things for people. It only starts there. As we share the life of Christ some people will want to know more. They need coaching. I want to challenge you this morning to not only be a life-giver but a life coach as well. What will that take? What makes a great coach? Let's turn to Mt. 4:18-21 and take a look at a couple of characteristics of the greatest coach who ever lived.

Great coaches see greatness in others. Jesus deliberately chose His team. He narrowed His focus from the masses to twelve men who signed on as apprentices. He selected them with the "applied foresight" of a coach and He invested Himself in them. At first glance, there was nothing special about the twelve but Jesus saw something they didn't even see in themselves.

"Expert athletic coaches often spot hidden potential in a high school football player or tennis player, and because of applied foresight, college sports dynasties are built. But Jesus had a corner on the 'potential' market. He had an uncanny ability to look past the obvious flaws in people's lives and envision who they could become if the power of God were released in their lives. Intrinsicly, he just wondered about people. Wondered what they could become. Wondered how they might look in a transformed state. Wondered what impact they could have if their lives were invested in things of eternal value. He somehow saw the godly worshiper clothed as a worn, wearied prostitute. The faithful disciple hiding inside a fisherman named Simon. The hidden philanthropist in the life of a crooked tax collector named Zacchaeus. The risk-taker in a cowardly Jewish ruler named Nicodemus. What a fantastic gift he had for seeing what nobody else could see!" (Bill Hybels, Just Walk Across The Room, p. 67)

What was Jesus looking for? He was looking for men who had a hunger for God. His disciples were common men with an uncommon hunger. Some of them had already been seeking God. **John 1:35-46...**

There was more to Jesus' choice than "uncanny ability?" He prayed before He selected those who would receive His full attention... **Luke 6:12-13**, "It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. ¹³ And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles." Have you ever asked God who you need to invest your life in? Who is it that would benefit from your time and attention for the purpose of "leading them in a growing relationship with Jesus Christ?"

Great coaches call for decisive action. As Jesus narrowed His search He tested their willingness to follow. When Jesus said, "Follow me," He was inviting them to a radically different way of life. I'm sure they didn't understand the full implications of what Jesus was asking them to do anymore than newlyweds understand the full implications of "for better or for worse," but they were willing to count the cost... v. 22.

One of the challenges we face as we share Christ with others is the paradox between salvation as a free gift and discipleship that costs us everything. It seems we are much better at the free gift part than we are the "crucified with Christ" part. I'm not suggesting we make the Gospel any harder than it is but we don't do people a favor when we make it too easy.

I once heard about a high school where several military recruiters were on campus for a school assembly. Each branch made a pitch for recruits. Most of them did their best to lure students to a room where they could give them more information. They said things like, "Join the Army and we'll train you for a future job." "Join the Navy and we'll pay for your education." "Join the Air Force and you will be eligible for all sorts of benefits." The Marine Corps recruit stepped to the microphone and said, "As I look around this gym I don't see many of you who have what it takes to be a Marine but if you think you do I'll be in room 304." The room was packed. Jesus' invitation was a demanding one but those who accepted it changed the world.

Great coaches set a great example. Jesus explained their mission in simple terms, "I will make you fishers of men." This reminds me of another great coach named Vince Lombardi who once entered the room where his Green Bay Packers were assembled and started his pep talk with, "Gentlemen, this is a football." Jesus not only explained His mission, He demonstrated it... vv. 23-25. He never asked the disciples to do things He Himself was unwilling to do. I'll never forget one of my high school football coaches who used to stand on the blocking sled with his huge belly hanging over his Spandex shorts screaming at us and doggin' us for being out of shape. His words contradicted his own condition.

There was no contradiction between Jesus' words and deeds. In fact, His ministry of healing was the validation of the message He preached. When John the Baptist was in prison awaiting his execution, he sent word to Jesus asking, "Are you the One?" Jesus said, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the Gospel preached to them." **Luke 7:22.**

What a strange answer to give a dying man. Jesus knew that John was looking for the kingdom of God, the rule of God, and that when the Messiah came to inaugurate the kingdom, these would be the signs. Jesus practiced what He preached.

What will it take for you to be a life coach? If you are a parent, you have no choice. You have a responsibility to coach your children. Even if you are not a parent I believe there are people around us every day desperate for someone to coach them. We can feed the poor, give stuff away, and do nice things for others but if that's all we do then our lives will have no lasting impact. Our mission is to identify those who will be life-givers to their domain and to show them how to do that.

We're going to close in prayer and ask God to help us identify who it is we need to invest our lives in. But before I do I want to remind you that you don't have to do this alone. When Jesus said, "I will make you fishers of men," we think of fishing as a solo sport. Bait a hook, snag a fish, reel it in and go get another one. Jesus used a practice they were intimately acquainted with as a metaphor for their mission. They used a net. It took more than one person to spread that net out on the water and then to pull it in. You are just one knot in the net. All of the knots in the net are networked together and work together to catch fish. You don't have to save the world all by yourself but you do have to go fishing if you are a follower of Christ.

In two weeks one of the greatest coaches who ever lived will turn 99. John Wooden coached the UCLA basketball team for 27 years. He was responsible for 10 national championships in his last 12 years, a streak that I doubt will ever be matched. Wooden is a legend not just as a coach but as a man. I recently read an article written by an ESPN writer who saw something in Wooden's life that inspired him to write, "On Tuesday the best man I know will do what he always does on the 21st of the month. He'll sit down and pen a love letter to his best girl. He'll say how much he misses her and loves her and can't wait to see her again. Then he'll fold it once, slide it in a little envelope and walk into his bedroom. He'll go to the stack of love letters sitting there on her pillow, untie the yellow ribbon, place the new one on top and tie the ribbon again. The stack will be 180 (it's now up to 224) letters high then, (because it has been 24 years) since Nellie, his beloved wife of 53 years, died. In her memory, he sleeps only on his half of the bed, only on his pillow, only on top of the sheets, never between, with just the old bedspread they shared to keep him warm."

Wooden once said, "Material possessions, winning scores, and great reputations are meaningless in the eyes of the Lord, because He knows what we really are and that is all that matters." He also said, "I'm not afraid to die, besides, I'll get to see Nell again." Of the 180 athletes who were on his national champion teams, he still knows where 172 of them are. John Wooden will die soon but he leaves a legacy of devotion to God and to those he coached.

By contrast I kept an article from the DMN about Jimmy Johnson when he was coach of the Cowboys... We get one shot at this thing, one brief life. We can invest it in the lives of others or spend it on ourselves. One path leads to life.