



Epiphany

1/25/2026

Matthew 4:12-23

## Are You Up For It?

Are you up for it?

I'm sure that's a phrase you've heard of before. Maybe it went through your mind right before a job interview, or right before a big play in a game, like a free throw or a penalty kick. If you've practiced a ton, or have had success in the past, it makes things easier because you know the answer is yes. But if you're not good at something, if you've never gotten something right before, your heart starts pounding. All you can think to yourself is: "I'm not the right person for this job!"

You could honestly ask some pretty similar questions as you go through our verses for today. Matthew 4 tells us about the calling of the first disciples. Were these the right men for the job? Were they up to the task?

The short answer to that question, at least by human standards, is no. These men were far away from Jerusalem, where most of the religious scholars spent their time. They lived on the outskirts of Israel, in one of the more dangerous parts of the country on the frontier that was often the first to get hit by foreign invaders. At least a couple of them had followed John the Baptist for a bit, but they still weren't very well educated. Instead they were fishermen. Gruff, blue collar workers. It's safe to say none of these men had preached a sermon or led a Bible class before. It did not seem like they were the right people for the job!

But Jesus had other ideas. [READ] Matthew presents the details in a way that feels mundane, almost casual. These four men had no idea that Jesus was walking on the beach in order to give them a full time call to be his followers. But once they hear those words from Jesus, there's no hesitation. [READ]. The response is drastic and immediate. They don't seem like the right guys for the job, but the second they hear Jesus' words, they are jumping out of their boats, dropping their nets, and right away there is a change in their lives, inside and out.

Incredible words. But allow me to ask you an uncomfortable question. Do you feel a twinge of jealousy when you hear these verses? There is such a clear, obvious change in the lives of these four men. Why hasn't something similar happened to you?

Now don't get me wrong, I know many of us can think of ways we really have matured. Maybe it's a temptation that doesn't bother you so much anymore. Maybe there are some things about Christianity that you understand a lot better now that you've spent more time in the Bible.

But at the same time, no matter how much growth you have experienced, there are still struggles. You are better at dealing with one temptation, but a couple new ones have started to bother you. You understand the Bible better, but your doubts haven't gone away, they've just changed. We try to follow Jesus, but it feels like we take one step forward and two steps back.

It all brings us to an uncomfortable truth. One of the most frustrating parts about being a Christian is that you are still you. Coming to faith didn't take your health problems away. It didn't take away your past trauma or grief. In some ways you might actually feel like a worse person. Because you understand what sin is now, you know it's bad, but you still struggle with it anyway.

It raises some tough questions. If I'm really a Christian, shouldn't there be an obvious change? Maybe I don't expect everything in the world around me to go my way, but shouldn't the struggle against my own selfishness be easier? How can I be a disciple of Jesus when I'm constantly getting in my own way, when I'm constantly getting in GOD's way? Am I really following Jesus at all?

There's an answer for those questions. It's right here in Matthew 4. At first glance, these verses might seem like they are giving us an impossible standard for what following Jesus looks like, they might make you wish your life looked a bit more like Peter's or Andrew's or John's. But look a little closer, and you'll find that these words are actually recorded for struggling saints like me and you.

Just take another look at those words from Isaiah. It's an epic description of Jesus being the light of the world. Who is this Light for? The people living in darkness. Those living in the land of the shadow of death. Not for people who deserve it. Not for people who never make mistakes, or never struggle with anything anymore, or who look completely put together all the time. No, it's for those in darkness. That means us! The Light has dawned on you.

That means that as followers of Jesus, as struggling saints, we find confidence not in our own lives, but in the life of Christ. The gospel writer Matthew arranged his entire book to highlight that point. In chapters 1-3, we hear about Jesus' birth. We hear about his baptism, about him beginning to preach. The life of Jesus is front and center. Not until chapter 4 do we get to meet any of the disciples. That's because Matthew is giving us a reminder that Christians need to look to Jesus as the source of their life, not themselves.

That was true for the original disciples too. Peter might drop his nets and follow Jesus here, but his struggles were far from over. He was a bit of a loudmouth. At one point he tries to tell Jesus to stop talking about his death so much. Eventually, after Jesus is arrested, he denies even knowing him to begin with.

Matthew, the writer of the gospel, was a tax collector. One of the most hated people in ancient Jewish society. He was basically a thief, a traitor to his country, and I'm sure that mark on his record didn't simply disappear the second he became a disciple.

Really all the disciples are kind of foolish... yes, they followed Jesus, but they sinned, they got in the way, they had arguments about which one of them was the greatest, they often were confused or fearful. They were people living in darkness too.

But that never changed the call that Jesus gave them. A call based not on who the disciples were. But on who Jesus was. A call based on the grace, the undeserved love, of God.

So maybe you wish you had no doubts at all anymore. Maybe you wish you had an outward, permanent victory over your problems. Maybe you just wish you didn't feel so miserably sinful. In those moments, remember that your call as a disciple is not based on how worthy you are. It's based on who Jesus is. He's the one who shows undeserved love and mercy all the time. He's the one who shines on people in darkness. He is the one who calls you. Who saves you.

And he does something else too. Not only does Jesus make you his follower, he also gives you work to do in his kingdom. [READ]

Fishers of men. Kind of an interesting job description, isn't it? It's closely connected to something Jesus is going to say to his disciples at the end of Matthew gospel. [READ Great Commission]. Jesus wants to share the good news of salvation with the world, and he wants to use Christians to do it. All of us are fishers of men, just like the first disciples were.

I think that word "fishers" is worth thinking about. I've gone fishing a few times in my life, and to be honest, it never went that well. I went fishing with my grandpa in the mountains around here a few times, and we must have been bad at picking spots because we never caught fish bigger than a few inches. One time, my family went on a fishing boat in southern CA. The only thing I caught was a bad sunburn. It reminds me of a sign I saw once that says: Fishing. If it was easy it would be called catching.

We already talked about how our lives as Christians can sometimes feel like we're taking one step forward and two steps back. The same is true when we share our faith with others. You win an argument about evolution with somebody, but you end up offending them in the process. You worked up the nerve to invite your neighbor to church, and you got an awkward: "Oh. Yeah, I guess I'll think about that." Or maybe you're the only Christian in your family, and it makes you think: "My kids won't even listen to me. Why should I even attempt at sharing my faith with anybody else? I'm no good at it."

Well, I suppose if evangelism was easy Jesus would have called us "catchers of men". So where do you find the strength to keep going? How do you know you're really up for it?

Look at the verse again. Jesus doesn't say, "Try hard enough and you'll be fishers of men." No. "I will make you..." God is the one who gives you the strength you need. He'll give you encouragement when the gospel seems like it isn't getting any results. He'll be with you when you're nervous. He'll teach you everything you need to know. How? Through his Word. He gives you what you need as you read your Bible at home, as you hear about it at church with other believers.

Going to church and sharing your faith with others are not two separate activities. They are two sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other. Think of it this way: if a waitress is going around and filling up people's cups, it won't be long before her pitcher runs out of water. When that happens, she needs to head back to the kitchen to get more. She can't fill up the cups of others if she isn't filling up the pitcher for herself.

That's true for the gospel too. If you want to share your faith with others, come back to the source. The Holy Spirit will fill you up with the message of salvation and forgiveness in the Bible, he'll give you Christ's own body and blood at communion. He fills our hearts with peace and forgiveness, and those blessings overflow to the people around us too.

Yes, it'll be hard sometimes. Evangelism is a struggle, rejection is still painful. But you are never doing it alone. God is with you no matter what, always reminding you that it's his Word that changes hearts, not your words.

So are you up for it? Are you up for a life of following Jesus, for your task as a fisher of men? Yes. Because God has already given you faith, and made you his follower. Because he promises to make you a fisher of men. Because he promises to be with you and work through you as you spread the good news of his love. Now and always.