

## 029: Coming to the End of Yourself

*(based on Sermon #24 in the Life of Christ Series)*

How well I remember being crushed under the weight of my own sinfulness and anemic spirituality.

- More than thirty years ago, before entering pastoral ministry, I filled the pulpit at a nearby church.
- Stepping to the pulpit to preach, I noticed someone in the audience who brought to mind some of my past sins several years previous to that, and I broke down weeping at the pulpit for a couple of minutes before I could preach.
- It was a necessary time of inward confession and cleansing, but very uncomfortable.
- Ironically, my text for that sermon was Isaiah 6, where Isaiah sees Jehovah God high and lifted up on His throne.
- Isaiah becomes “unglued;” he melts in the presence of God, crying out, “Woe is me, for I am undone!
- Because I am a man of unclean lips.”

I felt like Isaiah, coming to the end of myself.

- Something similar also happened to Job, when he cried out at the end of God’s intense questioning:
- “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes!”
- That is coming to the end of yourself.
- Have you gotten to that point in your Christian life?
- You cannot be an effective disciple of Jesus until you come to the end of yourself.
- I believe that is what happens to Peter in Luke 5:

Luke 5:1-11

- 1-2 So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, and saw two boats standing by the lake; but

the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets.

- 3 Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat.
- 4 When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”
- 5 But Simon answered and said to Him, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.”
- 6 And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking.
- 7 So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.
- 8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”
- 9-10 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.”
- 11 So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.

What do you suppose is going through Peter’s mind when Jesus commands him in v. 4 to move the boat away from shore and launch out into the deep for a catch of fish?

- Peter is surely thinking: “Wait a minute!
- I’m the fisherman; you’re a carpenter by trade.
- I don’t tell you how to measure and cut boards.
- So don’t you tell me how to fish!”

- Of course, Peter doesn't actually *say* that, but his response in v. 5 implies it:
- "Master, we have fished all night long and haven't caught a thing.
- As if to say, "I know by experience that at night is the best *time* to fish, and shallow waters are the best *place* to fish."
- "If we didn't catch anything during the night in shallower waters, what makes you think we are going to catch fish in the day time in deeper waters?"
- Nevertheless, because of my respect for you as the Master, I will throw out the nets."

You know the result.

- Peter and the others are overwhelmed with fish.
- In fact, their nets start to break, so they call for help from the other boat.
- In the end, they fill both boats to overflowing, so they start sinking.
- Amazed by the astounding outcome, Peter — ashamed that he has doubted Jesus — falls down before the Lord and cries out, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"
- That doesn't mean he wants Jesus to leave.
- It means he feels completely inadequate in the presence of Jesus.

Peter comes to the end of himself in the presence of the Son of God.

- In great agony of soul, this experienced fisherman admits, "I am a sinful man, oh Lord!"
- Have you ever come to the end of yourself and had a Peter-like moment?

- Have you ever gotten to the point where you realize that God is everything and you are nothing without Him?
- That is what happens to Peter in the boat, and it leads to his decision to leave aside his fishing career and follow Jesus as His disciple.
- Incidentally, coming to the end of yourself and following Jesus in discipleship are not the equivalent of getting saved (regenerated).

M.R. DeHaan said:

- *There is a vast difference between coming to Jesus for salvation, and coming after Jesus for service. Coming to Christ makes one a believer, while coming after Christ makes one a disciple. All believers are not disciples. To become a believer, one accepts the invitation of the Gospel; to be a disciple one obeys the challenge to a life of dedicated service and separation. Salvation comes through the sacrifice of Christ; discipleship comes only by sacrifice of self and surrender to His call for devoted service. Salvation is free, but discipleship involves paying the price of a separated walk. Salvation cannot be lost because it depends upon God's faithfulness, but discipleship can be lost because it depends upon our faithfulness.*

What characterizes a life of discipleship?

- In this study we are going to look at three Scripture passages that show the progression in the lives of the first disciples who forsake all to follow Jesus.
- **1. Spending time with Jesus**

John 1:35-41

- 35 The next day, John stood with two of his disciples.

- 36 And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, “Behold the Lamb of God!”
- 37 The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.
- 38 Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, “What do you seek?” They said to Him, “Rabbi” (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), “where are You staying?”
- 39 He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour).
- 40 One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.
- 41 He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated, the Christ).
- 42 And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, “You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas” (which is translated, A Stone).

Peter and his brother Andrew are in Judea, listening to John the Baptist.

- They have become John’s disciples.
- John, of course, is the forerunner of the Messiah, and has lived for this moment.
- He has been preaching the gospel of the kingdom.
- When Jesus arrives, John says, “Behold the Lamb!”
- Peter and Andrew start following Jesus.
- They are intrigued and want to learn more about the Lamb of God.
- Jesus turns to them and asks, “What do you seek?”
- In other words, “What do you want?”
- They want to know where the rabbi is staying, so they can hear Him teach.

- He then gives them the invitation of a lifetime: “Come and See!”
- They take Jesus up on His offer and spend the rest of the day with Him, no doubt dining together and listening to Him teach, perhaps asking many questions.

Spending time with Jesus is a prerequisite to following Him in discipleship.

- Why would you follow someone you don't know?
- But those who spend time in His Word, get to know Him.
- To them He makes an unprecedented offer:
- Rev. 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.
- What an offer!
- Jesus fellowships with those who feast on His Word.
- Will you take Him up on the offer?
- Will you seek Jesus in His Word? Will you dine with Him?
- If you refuse, you will never become a disciple.
- Some take this first step and learn about Jesus, but they’re not willing to take the next step.
- What characterizes a life of discipleship?
- **2. Leaving other things behind**

Matt. 4:13-22

- 13-16 And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”

- 17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
- 18 And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.
- 19 Then He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”
- 20 They immediately left their nets and followed Him.
- 21-22 Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

Jesus is now ministering in Galilee, the region of His upbringing.

- He leaves Nazareth (located about thirty miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee) to dwell in Capernaum (located at the northern tip of the Sea).
- The Sea of Galilee is the lowest freshwater lake on Earth (about 700 ft. below sea level), and the second-lowest lake in the world (after the Dead Sea, a saltwater lake).
- It is thirteen miles long and eight miles wide, with a circumference of approximately thirty-three miles.
- The small, inland “Sea” is also known as Lake Gennesaret, the Sea of Chinnereth, and the Sea of Tiberias.
- The Sea of Galilee is a beautiful place, my favorite spot in all of Israel.
- The lake is great for fishing even today.
- While in Israel I had the privilege of eating a fish lunch caught from the Sea of Galilee.
- The species is tilapia, which locals dub “St. Peter’s fish.”

Why would Jesus relocate thirty miles away from his hometown of Nazareth to Capernaum on the Sea?

- There are three primary reasons.
- First, Jesus is no longer welcome in Nazareth.
- In anger, the people of His hometown sought to kill Him by throwing Him off the cliff at the edge of town.
- Second, Capernaum is a strategic city.
- Not only is it located on the Sea of Galilee, which allows for quick transport by boat to any other city near the lake, but it is also on the ancient road from Damascus to the Mediterranean Sea.
- In other words, a major trade route passed through the city, bringing many travelers.

No doubt Jesus is thinking of the strategic opportunity to spread the Gospel of the Kingdom throughout Israel.

- Third, dwelling in Capernaum also gives a glimpse of His larger vision of eventually reaching the Gentile world.
- Capernaum is in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali.
- Those tribal divisions were of greater significance during the monarchy and before, during the time of the judges.
- Because of foreign invasions by Assyria and Babylon, and now Roman rule, the tribal distinctions no longer matter.
- Matthew mentions these two tribal regions because of a prophecy found in Isa. 9:1-2, which Matthew quotes in 4:15-16:
- 15-16 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”

Isaiah refers to Galilee as “Galilee of the Gentiles.”

- Why does he use this term?

- During the Assyrian invasion of the ten tribes of the north in 722 BC, the region of Galilee was hardest hit, because it was not insulated, being the northern border of Israel.
- Many Gentiles were brought into Galilee as part of the Assyrian immigration program.
- The New American Commentary reports that, at the time of Christ, the population of Galilee was half Gentile.
- The commentary then arrives at this conclusion:
- “So Matthew no doubt sees here a foreshadowing of Christian ministry to those who were not Jews.”
- Not to mention, Matthew is quoting an Old Testament prophecy (Isa. 9).

Other passages in Isaiah also speak of Israel’s ministry to the Gentiles.

- Isa. 42:6 I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles.
- Isa. 49:6b I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.
- Simeon, when praying over the baby Jesus said:
- Luke 2:30-32 For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.”
- Matthew essentially tells his readers that Jesus moved to Capernaum to fulfill prophecies from the Old Testament book of Isaiah about the Gentiles being impacted with the gospel.

The term *gospel* means *good news*.

- For us, the gospel is the good news of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the salvation that Jesus offers.
- But that is not the message Jesus was preaching to the Jews of the first century.
- It would not have been good news for them to hear that Messiah was coming to die.
- They wouldn’t be able to process that with their limited Old Testament revelation.
- To the Jews of the first century, the expectation was that Messiah was coming to establish His Messianic kingdom.
- Israel would at last rule over the nations, according to Old Testament prophecy!
- That is good news to a first century Jew. But Jesus adds something to that message:
- Matt. 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Many modern theologians claim repentance is required for salvation (i.e., regeneration), along with faith.

- But, as pointed out several times in this book, that is not correct.
- Repentance is a matter of works, for repentance is a change of mind that precipitates behavioral change, whereas salvation is not of works.
- Eternal life is a gift of God received by believing Jesus for it.
- Marvin Vincent the Greek scholar says:
- *Repentance, then, has been rightly defined as “Such a virtuous alteration of the mind and purpose as begets a like virtuous change in the life and practice.”*
- When the Jews hear this message from Jesus, they are not thinking anything about salvation, in the New Testament sense of regeneration. They are thinking —

based on their Old Testament knowledge — that they must repent, turn from their sinful ways and get right with Jehovah.

There is one other peculiarity in this message.

- After urging the nation to repent, Jesus announces, “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
- Keep in mind that, according to the Old Testament, Israel had already been promised an earthly kingdom.
- That was a given; it was an unconditional promise.
- The day will come when Israel will rule over the earth through her Messianic king.
- But by announcing, “the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” Jesus offers something greater.
- Those who repent and become obedient disciples of Jesus will be included in the kingdom of the heavens.
- The kingdom of the heavens is the ruling realm of the kingdom, the New Jerusalem which, according to the book of Revelation, will descend from heaven to hover over Earth during the millennial kingdom.
- From that heavenly city, Jesus will rule over the Earth, along with His faithful followers — those who have repented and followed Him in discipleship.

What characterizes a life of discipleship is leaving behind the things of this world to follow Jesus.

- Disciples count the cost.
- Peter and Andrew have already witnessed verbal persecution against John the Baptist in Judea.
- These fishermen have likely heard about — and maybe have seen — Christ’s near-death experience in Nazareth, when the people resented His message and rose up against Jesus to throw Him off a cliff.

- They know that following Jesus could incur persecution, but a disciple determines to go forward as a follower despite the cost.
- In Matt. 4:18-22 Jesus walks by the Sea of Galilee in Capernaum and sees Peter and Andrew casting a net into the sea, for they are fishing. Jesus says to these fishermen, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19).
- In other words, if you choose to leave fishing behind to follow me you will catch men for Jesus.

The Greek word translated *men* is *anthropos*, which refers to all mankind, both men and women.

- Jesus also calls James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and all four of these men immediately leave their nets and follow Jesus as disciples.
- Incidentally, as children we would sing the little chorus:
- “I will make you fishers of men.”
- We were taught to do hand motions with the song that imitated the modern rod-and-reel method of fishing — casting a fishing line and then reeling it back in.
- But that fishing imagery is all wrong for illustrating biblical fishermen, because it implies that fishing for men is by using a hook and bait, both of which are deceptive.
- Pointing people to Jesus is never deceptive.
- We merely give the message and let the Holy Spirit bring conviction.

Thus, the imagery of casting nets is much more appropriate.

- We cast the net of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit prompts men to swim into the net, and we draw it in.
- It is an entirely different metaphor than rod and reel and bait and hook

- What this means, in the Matt. 4 context, is that if you follow Jesus as His disciple, you will lead others to the same radical discipleship that you have chosen.
- Is that not what happened on the day of Pentecost?
- Three thousand Jews — who were already believers in an Old Testament sense — repented, turning their hearts back to Jehovah.
- There was a great revival on the day of Pentecost.
- Peter, along with the other disciples, truly became fishers of men.
- They later brought the message to the Gentile world, in fulfillment of Christ’s vision and Old Testament prophecy.
- What characterizes a life of discipleship?
- 1. Spending time with Jesus
- 2. Leaving other things behind

### **3. Coming to the end of yourself**

- In Matt. 4 the fishermen are casting their nets when Jesus arrives.
- In Luke 5 they are cleaning their nets.
- So Jesus gets into one of the boats, asks Simon to push away from shore a bit, sits down, and teaches the crowds from the boat.
- In the 1980s archaeologists discovered an ancient fishing boat covered in mud on the bottom of the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum when the sea level was low.
- They excavated carefully and found what has been affectionately dubbed “the Jesus boat,” because its carbon dates back to the time of Christ.
- I saw the remains of this boat in a museum at the Sea of Galilee, and it is a spectacular find because it clues us in as to the dimensions of fishing vessels in Christ’s day.

- The boat measures 27 ft. long, 7-1/2 ft. wide, and 4-1/2 ft high. So the ancient fishing vessels on the Sea of Galilee were not small craft, as originally thought.

### **Jesus gets into a boat very much like the one in the museum and begins preaching.**

- Commentators point out the excellent acoustics in this area. Consequently, the people can hear clearly.
- After Jesus finishes teaching, He tells Simon to launch out into the deep for a catch.
- They haul in so many fish that the boats are overloaded.
- They don’t sink, but they limp back to shore.
- When Peter sees this, he falls down before Jesus and cries out, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”
- This is not a salvation account, as some teach, but a sanctification and discipleship text.
- Peter recognizes the deplorable condition of his soul, repents, leaves his fishing career, and dedicates his life to serving Jesus.

### **The story of Jesus calling Peter and Andrew and James and John as disciples is very much like my own story.**

- During one of my college summers, I was privileged to work an internship in a Fortune 250 company in my hometown of Chicago.
- I loved it so much, that I decided to change my major to finance from pre-law.
- Upon graduation, I was offered a full-time financial position with the company, and a very nice starting salary and benefits.
- I excelled in the position and loved finance and accounting, and even started on a graduate degree in accounting, but then something happened to change all of that, a simple verse of Scripture:

- 2 Cor. 4:18 We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

I read that verse in my morning devotions, but dismissed it as not applying to me.

- I was already focusing on the eternal realm — or so I thought — because I was not living licentiously, and I remained faithful in church attendance and carrying other spiritual activities.
- God arrested my attention with that verse once again when my pastor preached a message from the same text.
- The Holy Spirit was telling me that my values were not eternal, but rather focused on the here and now.
- I now realize it is possible to live morally and go to church and read the Bible and pray and do other spiritual exercises and still not have an eternal focus.
- That is what God was telling me, but I kept ignoring His conviction.

Day after day, 2 Cor. 4:18 weighed heavily on me, but I refused to yield and carried that weight for several months while thinking about it.

- The last straw was when I heard the verse used on a Christian radio station while driving home from work.
- I knew God was directing it at me. I was focused on the temporary things of earth — making money and climbing the corporate ladder — the things of here and now.
- I was not focused on the eternal realm — the things we can experience only through faith.
- I was materialistic and God convinced me of that through His Word.

- I remember finally coming to grips with my wrong thinking and having a Peter moment, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”
- I felt like Isaiah, “Woe is me, for I am undone!”
- And like Job, “I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.”
- It was a very sobering moment when I came to the end of myself, *my* ways, and *my* philosophies.

At that moment, I confessed my wrong thinking and surrendered my values to the Lord, when I was twenty-four years old.

- Oh, the blessing of coming to the end of self!
- It’s painful, for swallowing pride and admitting wrong thinking can be very humbling.
- But it’s the beginning of letting go of self and letting God take the reins of your life.
- Starting from that point of surrender, my thinking changed.
- I repented of my earthly values.
- I started spending more time in the Word, desiring to learn about God and His supernatural realm.
- I stopped caring about making lots of money and exploring ways to become rich.
- And I lost all interest in the business world — the realms of finance and accounting that I had loved so much.
- It all faded away as unimportant to me and became merely a job by which to make an income to support my family.
- But it was no longer my passion.

Through it all I learned that becoming a disciple of Jesus requires coming to the end of self.



- God used 2 Cor. 4:18 to bring me to the end of myself and to call me to discipleship.
- Jesus wanted to know from me: “Will you follow me, and stop following the world?”
- I had been saved many years previously, at the age of six, and I was confident of my salvation in Jesus.
- But it was eighteen years later, at the age of twenty-four, when Christ said, “Follow me.”
- After some stubborn resistance on my part, I eventually yielded and followed Jesus, thank the Lord.
- That was my surrender to become a disciple of Jesus.
- Less than a year after the Lord called me to serve Him with my life in a career capacity.
- That happened, initially, by being called as Financial Director of a mission board, which required a financial sacrifice on my part.
- Then later I was called to the pastorate, which required an even greater sacrifice.

I laugh when I think about it today — that every step in my ministry career path has required a significant financial sacrifice.

- In other words, I always took pay cuts, sometimes quite significant, to go where I believe God was calling me.
- I would *never* have agreed to take another position in the business world that would have resulted in a pay cut.
- That’s not acceptable practice, in the temporal way of thinking.
- But when you are following God’s will as a disciple of Jesus, those things don’t matter.
- By the way, I don’t say these things to brag or because I want a pat on the back.
- And I certainly haven’t “arrived.”

- I have a long way to go to arrive at the goal of full maturity.
- I’m merely explaining matter-of-factly how my values changed.
- My philosophy of life was transformed from temporal to eternal, and for that, I can only praise the Lord!

Ironically, everything I sacrificed through the years God more than made it up to me later on.

- I wasn’t expecting that, but I am amazed to see how He takes care of those who follow Him.
- I recognize that God only calls some to full-time career ministry, but He calls *everyone* to be His disciple.
- Whether you are a janitor or mechanic or paramedic or salesman or baker, or housewife — or whatever — He wants you to follow Him with every ounce of your being, as a follower, a committed disciple. He wants you to forsake all that this world holds dear, pull out all the stops, and follow Him passionately.

I share my story with you because I believe that is what Peter and Andrew and James and John are experiencing in this text.

- They are leaving promising careers as fishermen to follow Jesus because they believe He is truly the Messiah who has come to launch His kingdom.
- If you believe Jesus is who he says He is, then you will give up whatever is necessary to follow Him too.
- Luke 14:33 So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.
- Have you come to the end of yourself and started following Jesus with diligence?