

WALKING WITH JESUS - PART 1

Testimony from the Mountain

Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Matthew 5:1-2
Subject:	What Jesus did when He sat down on the mountainside in Galilee
Complement:	He taught His disciples the principles of the kingdom of heaven
Exegetical idea:	When Jesus sat down on the mountainside in Galilee, He taught His disciples the principles of the kingdom of heaven..
Homiletical idea:	Jesus wants you to walk with Him!
Purpose:	In this first-person narrative sermon, as James the son of Zebedee, I intend to encourage my hearers to respond to the invitation of Jesus to walk with Him and be a part of His Kingdom.

Introduction

Shabbat shalom! My name is James, son of Zebedee. I am a fisherman from the city of Bethsaida. My father is a fisherman, as was his father before him. Our family operates a very successful fishing business on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. People in Bethsaida say that my father Zebedee is such a good fisherman that fish tremble at the sound of his name! Zebedee!!

I thought that I would spend the rest of my days toiling with nets on the sea of Galilee. But all of my plans have changed. The Word of the LORD through the prophet Jeremiah has been fulfilled. The LORD our God has given me a future and a hope! My life has been set on a new course, and I'm not turning back!

May I share my story with you? As I mentioned earlier, I come from the city of Bethsaida, on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Ever since I can remember, my father Zebedee has trained me to be a fisherman. And my father trained my brother too. His name is John. My brother and I would constantly fight when we were boys, but John has always been my best friend. We're not exactly the same, though. My brother John has always been more

spiritually minded than me. I was preoccupied with how to maximize our catch of fish or how to get the best prices at the market. John was always seeking to know the LORD our God and to walk in harmony with His Word.

More than a year ago, perhaps it's even longer than that—so much has happened in the last few months—my brother John headed south to the region where John the Baptist was baptizing in the river Jordan. I'm not sure if my brother went first to Perea, on the east side of the Jordan river, or to Judea on the west side of the Jordan river. He just kept looking until he found John the Baptist. I thought that my brother was just going down there to listen to the prophet John and perhaps to be baptized, but my brother stayed there in Judea. He believed that John the Baptist was a prophet sent from God and my brother John wanted to learn from him. And so he became a disciple of John the Baptist.

One day, Jesus of Nazareth came to the river Jordan to be baptized. My brother John told me the story. When Jesus asked John the Baptist to baptize Him, John the Baptist replied, “I need to be baptized by You, and You are coming to me?”

John the Baptist recognized that this was the Sinless One. The Messiah. But Jesus said to John the Baptist, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” And so John the Baptist baptized Jesus. And something amazing happened when Jesus came up out of the water! My brother John told me the story! The Spirit of God descended from heaven in the form of a dove, and rested upon Jesus. And then there was a voice heard from heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

I wish that I had been there to witness that scene; to hear that voice from heaven. As I said earlier, my younger brother John was there. And he heard his teacher, John the Baptist,

testify, “I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.” The following day, Jesus came again to the Jordan river again. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he cried out, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!” That was the day that my brother began to follow Jesus and he’s been following Jesus ever since!

But let me tell you about the day that I left everything to follow Jesus. We had been fishing one night on the Sea of Galilee. Myself, John, our father Zebedee, and also our partners, Simon and Andrew. They were in another boat. We worked together. The wise man Solomon declared that two are better than one, and that’s true in fishing too. Two boats are better than one! If one of us found a good place to fish, we would beckon to the other boat, so we both could get a good catch! We even developed a system of arm signals!

Well, we had been working all night, and it had been “one of those nights!” You know what I’m talking about, I’m sure. (Use arm signals) The kind of night that you don’t want to remember. We had worked hard all night and caught nothing. My father Zebedee was with us that night. And half joking I told my father that he was right. Fish do tremble at the sound of his name! The fish were so afraid of him that they all swam away to another part of the lake! As the first rays of the morning sun began to appear over the eastern mountains, we pulled up our boats on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee and began to clean our nets. No fish. Only weeds.

That’s when Jesus came over and asked Simon and Andrew if He could borrow their boat. Jesus had been healing and teaching in the region and the multitudes were following Him everywhere He went. Young and old, peasants and shepherds, religious leaders and tax collectors. That morning, the crowd was so large that Jesus was feeling swamped. So Simon and Andrew helped Jesus to get into their boat and pushed off from the shore. Not far. Jesus

wasn't trying to get away. He still wanted to speak to the people on the shore. He was close enough that I could clearly hear Him and even see the expressions on His face as He taught the people. I listened as I cleaned my nets.

After teaching for some time, Jesus turned to my friend Simon in the boat and said, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." My first reaction was to laugh! We had worked all night and caught nothing. And now it was morning. You don't catch fish during the day, not with a net! Why, even my father Zebedee couldn't do that. Catching fish with a net during the day would take a miracle! But Simon and his brother Andrew obeyed the command of Jesus. And we all watched from the shore.

When their boat was out in the deep water, Simon and Andrew cast their net over the side of the boat. I couldn't see the expressions on their faces from that distance, but I'm sure that they glanced toward the shore, wondering what we were all thinking! That's when I began to notice a panic in the boat. Then in the distance, I noticed the familiar arm signals. We had a plan in place when one of us needed some help. I recognized those arm signals. Simon and Andrew needed help! I turned to my brother John. But before I could say a word, John was already pushing our boat out into the water! I ran alongside him, jumped into the boat, and soon we were rowing out to help our partners.

What we saw as we approached their boat shocked us! Simon and Andrew's net was so full of fish that it was about to break. They didn't even dare to try to pull the catch of fish into the boat. So we came alongside to help them—our boat here, and their boat over there, with the net full of fish in between us! We worked frantically, grabbing flopping fish and slinging them into our boats. By the time we had brought all of the fish on board, both of our boats were about

to sink.

About that time, Simon fell down in front of Jesus, who was also knee-deep in fish, and Simon said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” But Jesus calmly responded to Simon’s frantic cry and said, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.” Even though I was in the other boat, I felt like I was on holy ground. I wanted to take off my sandals, but I was also knee deep in fish!

When we finally got back to the shore, the crowd welcomed us with shouts and hallelujahs! They knew that we had experienced a miracle of God! That’s the day that I decided that I too would leave everything, and follow Jesus. Oh, we didn’t throw away the fish. We needed that catch to care for our families. Remember that our father Zebedee was there with us. Now he had the most amazing fish story to tell his friends! We left the catch, and the boats in his care! He looked elated and confused all at once. The greatest catch of his life and both of his sons leaving the family business on the same day. But we knew deep in our hearts that the LORD our God was leading us. And we sensed that our father knew that too. So we left our business as fisherman and followed Jesus.

I wish that I had time to share with you all the wonderful things that have happened since that day. I have seen a leper healed. That’s right. A leper, made whole! A paralyzed man able to walk again! People possessed by demons have been set free. One Sabbath when we were at the synagogue, Jesus healed a man whose right hand was withered. “Stretch out your hand!” Jesus said, and the man’s hand was completely restored, right before my eyes. The religious leaders were angry. But I knew that Jesus was the Son of God.

So when Jesus called us up onto the mountainside, overlooking the sea of Galilee, I

sensed that something special was about to happen. I was expecting Jesus to make a special announcement about setting up His kingdom. After all, people were talking about Jesus throughout Galilee. He had been walking around the region announcing “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” People were even coming down from Syria in the north, and the region of Decapolis on the east side of the Jordan, and Judea in the south. Everyone wanted to be with Jesus, to be healed of their diseases, and to listen to His words of life. I thought of the words of the prophet Isaiah: “The people who dwell in darkness have seen a great light!” “Arise and shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon you!”

Jesus had just spent the whole night in prayer. Early in the morning, He invited us to draw near. He seemed to be filled with a heavenly peace. Jesus laid His hands on each one of us, and blessed us. There were twelve of us altogether: Simon, Andrew, myself and my younger brother John, Philip and Bartholomew..he is also called Nathanael, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus..we call him that so the two of us don’t get mixed up!, Simon...he used to be a Zealot, Thaddaeus and Judas Iscariot. I think that’s all of us. Twelve in all. Jesus laid His hands on us and blessed us. He called us to be with Him. To walk with Him. He told us that He wanted us to join Him in His work. He wanted to send us out to share the good news that we had learned.

When we came down the hillside to the shore of the lake, a great multitude had gathered. They all wanted to touch Jesus. To be healed. Set free. And Jesus had compassion on them. Jesus healed them all. All who came, reaching out in simple faith, were healed!

But again, it was so crowded that Jesus made his way back up the hillside, overlooking the lake, and found a level place where the multitude could be seated and listen to His words.

Jesus taught most of the day. I tried to absorb everything that He was saying, but I think that it will take a lifetime of study and reflection to fully grasp all of His messages that day. I even got a little sleepy sitting in the afternoon sun, but my brother John gave me a complete report of everything that I missed! John has always had a great memory!

Jesus started out with these words: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven! Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Then Jesus turned to us and said, “Blessed are you, when they revile you and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.” What are you talking about, Jesus? “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

I didn't know quite what to make of it all. I'm just a fisherman. At least, I used to be. I didn't have any great plans to be persecuted for anything! I just planned to catch fish, clean nets, and live peacefully on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

But I have decided to walk with Jesus. And no matter what the future holds, I'm not turning back. I'm not really sure why Jesus called ME. I'm not perfect, you know. Ask my brother John. But he's not perfect either. We been having temper tantrums since we were little boys. It was mainly his fault! He always started it! Actually, we both need help when it comes

to our attitudes.

I'm so thankful that I don't have to be perfect to respond to the call of Jesus. Jesus called me to follow Him just as I am. He called me to walk with Him. And I just sense such healing when I am in the presence of Jesus. I'm still not sure what lies ahead. But this much is sure: I want to walk with Jesus.

And as we walk with Jesus, the words that Jesus shared on the mountainside that day will guide us on our journey. I'm going to continue to reflect on those words of Jesus. I sense that Jesus wants me to memorize them, to hide them in my heart. I hope that you will study those words of Jesus too, those words that He spoke on the mountainside, overlooking the Sea of Galilee. And that walk with Jesus will lead us to His Kingdom, a Kingdom which will last for ever and ever!