CALLING

Matthew's introduction (1:1 – 4:16) has barraged the reader with Old Testament quotations to show Jesus is indeed the Jewish Messiah, prophesied directly, indirectly, and typologically in numerous passages of the Hebrew Scriptures. Having established Jesus' Jewish credentials, he is now more interested in showing how Jesus differed from Judaism. Far from establishing a new law, Jesus came to fulfill and thus transcend the Moses covenant.
Craig Blomberg – Matthew, Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament, page 20

Walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Come after me and I will make you fishers of men." And they left their nets and immediately followed him. And when he went a little further, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, putting their nets in order. And he called them. And they immediately left the boat and their father and followed him.
Matthew 4:18-22

Matthew follows Mark in placing this passage after the statement Jesus makes regarding repentance and the Kingdom of God being at hand. All of that naturally flows prior to any ministry activity.

Luke structures this *calling* in chapter 5 of his Gospel, after an account of Jesus performing some ministry activity in a synagogue at Capernaum and a healing where Simon is mentioned.

And after Jesus left the synagogue, he entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. So he stood over her, commanded the fever, and it left her. Immediately she got up and began to serve them.
Luke 4:38

Luke also gives the account of the calling of the first disciples coinciding with a teaching by Jesus along the sea, a great catch of fish and a confession by Peter.

I mention this only to show that each Gospel author has a focus that his account reveals about Jesus and their particular focus on the touchpoints each wishes to convey to their readers.

In the above passage, Matthew reveals his concern for parallelism which he why he twice mentions *"two brothers"* who are Simon and Andrew, along with *"two other brothers"* who are James and John. He also parallels the response of each pair by stating *"and they immediately left"*, the first pair leaving their nets, the second pair leaving the boat and their father.

Only four disciples are called in this passage and aside from Matthew being called in 9:9, there is no further calling of any other disciple in Matthew's narrative.

It should be clear that Matthew is using the calling of the two sets of brothers prior to the teaching discourse of the Sermon on the Mount in order to show that said Sermon is largely for them. In this sense, the calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John corporately represents the calling of all twelve.

What must be understood is that Matthew's desire is not to present a complete or chronological narrative. This is why he gives the reader no prior acquaintance between Jesus and the brothers and no reason as to why they answer the call.

What can be seen in the calling of the first disciples is an allusion to the Old Testament call of Elisha by Elijah. Jesus then, is the Prophet greater than Elijah.

> *Elijah went from there and found Elisha, son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen; he was near the twelfth pair. Elijah passed by him and threw his robe over him. He left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, "Please let me kiss my father and mother goodbye, then I will follow you." Elijah said to him, "Go back! Indeed, what have done to you?" Elisha went back and took his pair of oxen and slaughtered them. He cooked the meat over a fire that he made by burning the harnesses and yoke. He gave the people meat and they ate. Then <u>he got up and followed</u> Elijah and became his assistant.*
>
> *1 Kings 19:19-21*

Matthew notes the immediate reply of Elisha and the like manner in which the brothers respond.

> *What makes these people disciples? Is it, as we sometimes hear, something Jesus saw in Peter and Andrew, some potential, some sincerity that singled them out? Nothing of the sort is recorded. Matthew forcefully directs our attention away from anything in the disciples and toward the effective Word of Jesus, which does everything. Jesus says, "Follow me," and immediately they drop their nets and follow him. Matthew repeatedly underlines the power of Jesus' Word. The power that makes disciples is not the human potential of Peter and Andrew; it is the spiritual potency of the Word.*
>
> *Brunner – Matthew, page 143*

> *Walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers,*

The reference to the Sea of Galilee is a reminder to the fulfillment already mentioned in Isaiah.

> *But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter times he has made glorious <u>the way of the sea</u>, the land beyond the Jordan, <u>Galilee of the nations</u>.*
>
> *Isaiah 9:1*

When Matthew identifies Simon as the one called Peter, he is anticipating the important role Peter will play in this Gospel. The significance of the name Peter is not mentioned here without purpose. It will figure into Matthew's narrative in chapter 16.

And he said to them, "Come after me and I will make you fishers of men."
Matthew 4:19

The kind of fishing envisioned was net – not line – fishing, which involved a circular net that had heavy weights around its perimeter. The occupation of fishermen was labor-intensive. The imagery of using a lure and a line (and waiting for the fish to strike) is thus foreign to this text. Rather, the imagery of a fishermen involved much strain, long hours, and often little results. Jesus' point may have been one or more of the following: the strenuousness of evangelism, the work ethic that it required, persistence and dedication to the task (often in spite of minimal results), the infinite value of the 'catch' (people), or perhaps an eschatological theme of snatching people from judgment.
Matthew Commentary from NET Bible, page 1813

Know that this invitation of Jesus amounts to a demand which is based on electing grace. These brothers have been chosen by Jesus to follow after him. We see this same invitational wording used in other verses of Matthew.

<u>Come to me</u>, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Matthew 11:28

Again he sent other servants, saying, "Tell those who are invited, 'See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. <u>Come</u> to the wedding feast.'"
Matthew 22:4

Then the king will say to those on his right, "<u>Come</u>, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.
Matthew 25:34

Note that the invitation is accompanied by the promise that Jesus will equip them for the work that he has called them to. Their obedience is followed by his promise of provision.

In Luke's Gospel in chapter 5, this point is made more clear by the miraculous catch of fish which accompanies the invitation.

It was not uncommon in this culture for disciples to follow after rabbi's, not only learning from their teaching but following after their example. The difference with Jesus, however, is that the disciples do not come to him as was the custom of the day, but rather that he pursued them to establish the relationship.

The image of *"fishers"* is not new with Jesus. The prophets of the Old Testament already had spoken of people who were *"fishers"* of men.

In the case of Jeremiah, the Lord promises to bring the scattered people back to him by use of fishermen. Matthew applies this prophecy to a broader context and includes Gentiles in exile.

> *but, 'As the LORD lives who brough up the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them,' For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers. Behold, I am sending <u>for many fishers</u>, declares the LORD, and they shall catch them.*
> *Jeremiah 16:15-16*

> *And they left their nets and immediately followed him.*
> *Matthew 4:20*

Matthew clearly wants his readers to understand that the response of the brothers is immediate. We can reason this since he uses the same language regarding the response of James and John.

> *He apparently sees in this verse the pattern of true discipleship: the leaving behind of past preoccupations and the unhesitating and unconditional response of following.*
> *Hagner – Matthew, page 77*

What should be noticed in this calling and response is that Jesus is not calling the brothers to an experience of individual and personal salvation, but to a ministry *of* and *with* others. Matthew wants his readers to know that discipleship does not exist in isolation but is a living, breathing expression of one's calling with otherness.

Jesus calls Simon and Andrew to his discipleship school and even in this school his promise is *not their salvation* but to be *fishers of others*.

Matthew uses the verb *"follow"* often to place an emphasis on discipleship.

> *But Jesus said to him, "<u>Follow me</u>, and let the dead bury their own dead." And he got into the boat and <u>his disciples followed him</u>.*
> *Matthew 8:22-23*

> *And whoever does not take up his cross and <u>follow me</u> is not worthy of me.*
> *Matthew 10:38*

> *Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth: In the age when all things are renewed, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have <u>followed me</u> will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*
> *Matthew 19:28*

Their response was immediate. Their response was personal abandonment.

And when he went a little further, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, putting their nets in order. And he called them.
Matthew 4:21

The parallelism Matthew strives for is again seen in his wording *"two other brothers"* which connects this verse to the one introducing Simon and Andrew.

The phrase *"I will make you fishers of men"* is not repeated here but clearly implied.

The wording *"he called them"* is used by Matthew to denote an invitation into discipleship.

"Go and learn what this saying means: 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come <u>to call</u> the righteous, but sinners."
Matthew 9:13

He sent his slaves <u>to call</u> those who had been invited to the banquet, but they would not come.
Matthew 22:3

Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those <u>called</u> were not worthy.
Matthew 22:8

For the kingdom of heaven is like a man going on a journey, <u>who called</u> his slaves and entrusted his property to them.
Matthew 25:14

And they immediately left the boat and their father and followed him.
Matthew 4:22

With the exception of what James and John leave behind *(the boat and their father)*, this verse is verbatim to where Simon and Andrew leave their net. In this case, Matthew reveals that discipleship of the kingdom often involves separation from loved ones.

In Mark's version of this passage, the loss of James and John leaving their father is softened by Mark telling us that there were servants left with him.

In his emphasis on parallelism, Matthew omits this information so that this verse matches the response of Simon and Andrew while placing a heightened emphasis on the difficulty of discipleship and following Jesus.

Like the first two brothers, James and John also leave their occupation immediately, which Matthew stresses as a paradigm for discipleship in the cause of the Kingdom.

Some considerations as to why Matthew places the calling of the disciples here.

The disciples must be present at the beginning of Jesus' ministry as witnesses of that ministry as well as being recipients of his teaching.

It fits Matthew's stress for the importance and nature of discipleship.

This also reveals how Jesus went about gathering his followers.

This is important to Matthew for the calling of these disciples serves as a model of the nature of true discipleship in general. The call of God through Jesus is sovereign and absolute in its authority and Matthew lays that foundation to undergird his emphasis on discipleship.

The response of those who are called is to be both immediate and absolute, involving a complex break with old loyalties.

That there must be a fundamental and radical reorientation of a person's priorities is taken for granted by Matthew and his church.

And the important aspect of this is that what Matthew desires his readers to understand is that the reality of being a disciple of Jesus and discipling others is a reality that Jesus himself will equip those whom he calls.