

THE FIRST DISCIPLES

Matthew 4:12-25

All the classes should be taught the meaning of the two words *disciple* and *apostle*.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord can do for us spiritually through the Word the same miracles which He performed for men physically while He was on earth.

We need to forsake our own ideas and follow the Lord wholly if we are to be His disciples.

Notes for Parents

For our historical knowledge of the Lord's life on earth we should note that when He began His public ministry, He left Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and went to live in Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

We all recognize water as a symbol of truth and can easily understand that a sea is a picture of truth gathered together in one place—in our memory. There are two principal seas in the Holy Land which are mentioned often in the Bible story, the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. As the river Jordan is a symbol of truth from the Lord flowing down into the minds of men—the word *Jordan* means “descender”—we may think of these two seas as knowledge of the Word of the Lord in the minds of men of two different levels of character. The Jordan empties into the Dead Sea. The Word in its letter is so written that even a completely depraved person can read it and see what its teaching is. But in his mind it is stagnant and produces no life. There are no fish in the Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee, on the other hand, is full of fish. Fishing boats are always on its surface, and many of those who live on its shores make their living by fishing. In the mind of a man who has not destroyed his

spiritual capacity, the Word is full of living truths waiting to be drawn out and put to use.

This is why the Lord lived at Capernaum during the three years of His ministry and why the first disciples He called were fishermen. Peter and Andrew, James and John are names familiar to all of us. Peter, James, and John were to become the Lord's constant companions, the ones who were permitted to see Him transfigured. They were not learned men nor important people in the eyes of the world. What did the Lord see in them? The simple story of our chapter answers this question. They recognized the Lord, and when He said, "Follow me," they were willing immediately to leave all their own concerns and interests and to obey Him. So they became His first disciples (or "learners") and later His apostles – those "sent out" to carry to the world the good news of salvation.

There are three steps here which we should recognize as necessary for all of us who call ourselves Christians. First we must recognize the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the "anointed one," God Himself come into the world. Then we must be ready to leave our concern with self and our worldly ambitions and follow the Lord by learning the truths He teaches us in the Word and obeying them. Finally we must be eager to do all we can to bring the Gospel, the "good news," to others by the character of our daily lives, by our conversation, and by supporting our church in its efforts to reach both those near at hand and the wider audience which we cannot reach as individuals.

We are all, if we mean to live good lives, fishermen by the Sea of Galilee. And to each one of us the Lord comes with His simple command, "Follow me."

Primary

The simple story is easy to tell the children. Tell them about the Sea of Galilee and try to have them learn the word *Galilee*. Stress the fact that Peter and Andrew were brothers and James and John were brothers, that they were all fishermen, and that Peter had two names. Describe the difference between fishing with a hook and fishing with nets, and be prepared with a simple ex-

planation of what the Lord meant when He told them He would make them fishers of men. Tell the children that the Lord calls every one of us to follow Him and that we should be as willing as these first four disciples.

You remember that the Lord was born in Bethlehem. This was in the southern division of the Holy Land. Now do you remember where He grew up? It was in Nazareth, in the northern division. The Lord lived quietly in Nazareth until He was about thirty years old. Then He appeared before the people and began His public ministry. And He changed His home to a place called Capernaum.

Capernaum was also in the northern division of the land, the division known as Galilee, but it was on the eastern border of the land on the coast of the Sea of Galilee. Many of the people of Capernaum were fishermen, who owned boats on the Sea of Galilee and made their living by selling the fish they caught.

Our story today is about Jesus and four of these fishermen.

What did the Lord tell them?

Did they obey Him?

What two other brothers did He then see?

What were they doing?

What did they do when He called them?

These first four disciples are the ones about whom we read most in the Gospels. They went everywhere with the Lord and He taught them.

Disciple means a “learner” or pupil.

Verse 23 tells three kinds of things which the Lord did in His ministry.

What were they?

What were some of the troubles the people had who came to Him to be healed?

Do you know that the Lord wants every one of us to be His disciple?

When you come to Sunday school, you are learning about the Lord, aren't you?

The Lord calls every one of us to follow Him just as He did Peter and Andrew and James and John.

Junior

The geography of Galilee is important for this class. Review the three divisions of the Holy Land and the cities especially associated with the Lord's life. Have the class look up the prophecy (Isaiah 9:1-2) quoted in our chapter and see how it is fulfilled in this lesson.

Where was the Lord born?

Where did He grow up?

The Lord was about thirty years old when He came from Nazareth to the Jordan to John to be baptized. Then followed the forty days in the wilderness, and after that He was ready to begin His ministry. He did not go back to Nazareth to live, the reason being given in the Gospel of Luke (4:16-32).

Where did He go instead?

Where is Capernaum?

This was to be His headquarters during the remaining years of His earthly life.

The Sea of Galilee plays a considerable part in the Gospel story. You know that water pictures truth. A sea pictures knowledges gathered together in the memory, and the fish in it picture our affection for such knowledges. We all like to learn, even though sometimes we do not want to learn the things which are best for us to know. And we like to pull out of our memories the things we love best to think about. This is like fishing. The first four disciples were fishermen.

What were their names?

By what other name was Simon better known?

Read Matthew 16:13-18 to see how he got this name. *Peter* means a stone or rock. (See also John 1:42.)

When the Lord called Peter and Andrew, what did He tell them He would make of them?

This means that they would be able to draw out those who would really love the truth and obey it from among the great body of people for whom religion was a mere matter of memory knowledge.

These first four men whom the Lord called to follow Him were to become apostles. *Apostle* means “one sent forth.” The Lord was to send them forth into the world to preach His gospel, or “good news,” and to found the Christian Church. But first they must be disciples. A *disciple* is a learner or pupil. They went with the Lord everywhere, watching what He did and listening to His teaching.

In verse 23 we are told the three things which the Lord did in His ministry.

What were they?

What different kinds of ailments are described in verse 24?

If you think about it, you will see that these were troubles on the three different planes of life: will, thought, and act.

Which affected the will?

Which affected the thought?

Which affected the act?

Study a map of the Holy Land and see where Capernaum is and also some of the places mentioned in verse 25. *Decapolis* means “ten cities.” It was the name of a Roman province embracing territory in both Palestine and Syria, east of the Jordan.

Some people followed the Lord just to be healed. But the four disciples were not sick. Why do you think they obeyed so quickly when He called them to follow Him? It was because they were good men and looking eagerly for the promised Messiah and so they were able to recognize Him when they saw Him, and they wanted nothing so much as to follow Him and learn of Him. You know there are two kinds of people in the world: those who just want to have their own way and get all they can for themselves, and those who want to find out what is right and do it and help other people. Each of us has to choose which kind of person he will be. The Lord calls each one of us to follow Him just as He called Peter and Andrew and James and John. And He is ready to teach us just as He taught them.

Where does He call us and teach us?

We should each want to obey His call as promptly as they did. And like them we must be disciples first, and soon we shall find that we are also apostles, for other people will be inspired to learn of Him, too, because our lives will show what His teaching can do for a man or woman.



Intermediate

The correspondence of the sea and of fishing, boats, and nets should be discussed, stressing the difference between our own ideas and those of the Lord in connection with the meaning of discipleship.

The names Peter, James, and John are familiar to us all. They were the three who were closest to the Lord through the three years of His ministry. With Peter's brother Andrew, they were the first ones He called to follow Him.

Their home was at Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee and they were all fishermen. This was not an accident. The sea pictures knowledge gathered in the memory. Fish picture affections for such knowledge. Spiritual fishermen are those who love to draw up out of memory such knowledges as may be useful for life. It is these who hear the call of the Lord. When the Lord first saw them, the four men were in their ships. Two of them were "casting a net into the sea," and the other two were "mending their nets." Swedenborg tells us that a ship represents "doctrine," and that nets also represent doctrine. What is doctrine? It is simply teaching, truth formulated so that it can be expressed in words. It has sometimes been popular to say to ministers and Sunday school teachers, "Don't talk doctrine; talk about life and goodness." But when we talk about life and goodness, we are talking doctrine. Talking about charity and goodness is not charity and goodness, but doctrine. We can't say anything without talking doctrine. What we need to be sure of is that our doctrine is true and not false, and that means that it comes from the Lord and not from self. For we sometimes tell people as truth the things we want to believe, without stopping to find out whether or not they are really true.

Doctrine is represented in the Word by different kinds of containers, depending on the particular use which the doctrine is to serve. See if you can think out what the difference would be between doctrine as a ship and doctrine as a net. The ships in which the first disciples were sitting before they heard the Lord's call picture the general doctrines of the church in which they had been brought up. Their nets picture the ideas they had woven for

themselves “to catch fish,” that is, to make their knowledges useful in their daily life. They were called by the Lord to leave their ships and their nets and follow Him; that is, to turn from their religious doctrine and from their own ideas and go with Him to see what He would do for people and to listen to His teaching. The same call comes to us every day of our lives, the call to leave our natural ways of thinking and our own ideas and recognize the Lord as our leader and teacher.

The chapter goes on to tell some of the things the Lord did. Study verse 23 carefully. You will see that the Lord did three things: He preached, He taught, and He healed. Now study verse 24 and think what were the different kinds of trouble people brought to Him for healing and what spiritual troubles they represent. We are sick in soul whenever we are unhappy or afraid or filled with hateful thoughts and feelings. We are possessed with devils when we can't seem to control our temper or our dislikes or our desire to hurt people. Whenever we cannot see why we should not always have our own way, we are lunatic. And whenever we just can't seem to do right no matter how hard we try, we have the palsy. Every weakness and disease mentioned in the Word has a particular meaning.

People of all kinds followed the Lord. It makes no difference whether we are rich or poor, bright or dull, black or white; we can all be followers of the Lord. He loves each one of us just as much as any other, and can help us in whatever way we need help. Through the Word He preaches, teaches, and heals today just as He did long ago in Galilee. And today by means of the wonderful things He has revealed to us in the Word by His Second Coming, we can understand His teaching much better than the early disciples did. They saw and heard Him in the flesh, but we can see and hear Him in the spirit—with our minds and hearts.

Basic Correspondences

- fish = affections for memory-knowledge
- a ship = doctrine in general

- a net = doctrine we construct for our own use
- disease in general = any disorder in the soul
- possession by devils = control by our selfish and evil desires
- lunacy = imagining we are the center of the universe and that we do not need to learn of the Lord and obey Him
- palsy = the inability to carry out our good intentions steadily

Senior

The necessity of learning truth from the Word and following the Lord instead of our own ideas is the important subject for discussion. If we start with a false premise, the more we think the further we shall get from the truth. To “follow” the Lord is our first duty as Christians.

The Lord entered upon His public ministry at the age of thirty, and for three years He went about among men, as our chapter tells us, “teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.” We read in this brief statement a summary of His ministry to the mind, the heart, and the outward life, not only to the people of Palestine two thousand years ago, but to all men in all time—to us today.

At the very beginning of His ministry He called His first four disciples, who were all later to be apostles also. The twelve apostles, like the twelve sons of Jacob, represent all our faculties and affections. The Lord calls them all to follow Him, calls them from their worldly preoccupations to concern for spiritual and living things, calls them first to be disciples, “learners,” and then to go forth as apostles to help build the kingdom of heaven on earth. We should all desire to be apostles of the Lord, to bring the good news of salvation to all who need and want it. But we must be disciples first. For our own ideas of what is right and best are not the Gospel, and have no saving power for us or for anyone else.

The first disciples were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. A sea represents knowledge stored in the memory; and fish, the affection

for knowledge for its own sake. A ship represents doctrine in general—in the case of the four fishermen the doctrine of the church in which they had been brought up—and the nets, man-made ways of thought by which one draws from his memory what he most wants. There are many doctrines and many such systems of thought or philosophies in the world, and men are constantly busy “mending their nets.” But the Lord calls us to follow Him, to learn of Him instead of looking to our own minds for light. And if we can read the lesson of the Word, we shall be like those first four who “straightway left their nets, and followed Him.”

For the Lord speaks to us in His Word as clearly as He spoke to those who heard Him with their physical ears, and in these days of the Second Coming much more clearly and intelligibly. In John 8:31-32 He tells us: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” The truth which makes us free is not the reasonings of men but the truth as we find it in the Word. The reasonings of men, even of very learned men, are often based on false premises—the fundamental false premise being that men can discover the truth for themselves without looking to the Lord for light. And when we start with this fundamental false premise, we are not free: we are bound by our own limitations and by the appearances in the physical world around us. Our minds cannot rise above the plane of the natural world. And it is only by rising above the natural plane that we can see this world and our lives here in their true proportions and relations. This the Lord’s truth enables us to do.

When the Lord stood on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and called four simple fishermen to leave their nets and follow Him, no one could have imagined that by obeying His call they would become world-famous figures, founders of the Christian Church, which was to change the whole face of civilization. It does not seem to us that by looking to the Lord in the Word for guidance instead of to ourselves and “modern thought,” we shall travel further and accomplish more in the long run, but we should remember that “the long run” is eternity, and eternity is much

more important than anything we can get for ourselves in this world.

Adult

The meaning of the first four disciples, the order in which they are named, and the result of their call are all very important. The expression “fishers of men” should be developed in connection with the meaning of fish and fishing to give us a specific instead of a general idea of what the nature of our missionary efforts should be. If we ourselves have been in the habit of drawing living truths for use in our lives out of our memory-knowledge of the Word by means of the doctrines of our church, we shall be able to apply the same technique for the benefit of others. But it is essential that we recognize that we must all be disciples before we can be worthy apostles.

The Lord, by means of victories over temptations, brought His divine power down into the very outmost plane of His life on earth. This is pictured by His removal from Nazareth to Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The sea pictures knowledges collected in the memory; and fish, the affections for such knowledges which can give them life and make them of use. So the Lord’s first four disciples were fishermen, men who were symbolically trying to find truths for life in such knowledges as they had. When the Lord called them, they immediately recognized Him as the living truth and left their nets—that is, their own philosophies which they had been using—and followed Him. The Lord promised to make them fishers of men—to give them real spiritual truths in place of the natural truth on which they had been living. In a less interior sense, they became fishers of men when they went out to draw others into the Lord’s kingdom by the preaching of the Gospel.

The first four disciples were to become the best known of the twelve apostles. The apostles, like the twelve sons of Jacob, represent all the capacities in us which may be brought into the service of the Lord, that is, turned from natural to spiritual ends. In AE 820-821 (see below) we have perhaps the clearest and most complete statement of the meaning of the first four disciples and of their relation to the Lord. The accounts of their call given in

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are substantially the same. The order of their call is similar to the order of birth of the first four sons of Jacob. Peter, like Reuben, represents truth or faith. In the Gospel of John (1:35-42) Andrew is represented as having been a disciple of John the Baptist and as having through him recognized the Lord and then informed his brother Simon. This is given to teach us that truth, or faith, to be of real service must be sought from a desire to obey it; so Andrew actually precedes Peter in time. After his call, however, he virtually disappears from the Bible story, just as Simeon in the later history of the Old Testament seems to merge into Judah. And is not this exactly the true picture? Our early desire to obey the Lord becomes, if we regenerate, the life of charity. James, like Levi, represents charity, and John represents the works of charity.

Swedenborg tells us that if our life develops in its true order from the desire to obey into the love of divine truth, then into the love of good or charity, and finally into genuine good works, the good works contain all the other qualities; this also explains why John was loved more than the others by the Lord. But we must not forget the true order of development. Good works—in the ordinary sense of external good deeds—done from any other motive than love to the Lord and obedience to His commandments, are not genuinely good. Swedenborg compares them to artificial fruit “which in external form appears like fruit from a tree, although it is colored wax containing within it dust or bitumen” (DP 215¹³). Peter, James, and John, representing the reception of the Lord in thought, will, and act, became naturally the three who were closest to the Lord and who were allowed to witness things not seen by the others. To them were told the things to come, even though the individual men, as we know from the Gospel story itself, often did not understand or even remember what was told them.

The Lord’s work in Galilee, summed up in verse 23, pictures His work in the external plane of our lives when we turn to Him for help in temptation. First He calls His disciples—makes use of all our qualities. Then He teaches in the synagogues—shows us true

doctrine while we are in a state to receive it. He preaches the gospel of the kingdom—shows us the beauty and happiness of a life according to His laws. Finally He heals all manner of sickness and disease among the people—He helps us to overcome the bad habits and false thoughts which stand in the way of our spiritual health. Even the interests and activities in our lives which apparently have had no connection with our religion come to the Lord to be put right; these are the people from beyond Jordan.

Three types of sickness are specifically mentioned, and we can see that these picture evils in the three planes: those possessed with devils represent evils in the heart; the lunatic are falsities in the mind; and those that had the palsy picture the bad habits of conduct that make it difficult for us to carry out our good desires. All the good effects of the Lord's spirit follow in the train of sincere efforts to give up our own way and follow the Lord.

The Lord began His ministry with John's message: "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." It is always at hand if we will do the work of repentance. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:20) We open the door by repentance, by seeing our evils and our need of the Lord, and by turning to Him in His Word for guidance and strength.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, nn. 820-821: "The apostle Peter in the Word of the Evangelists means truth from good which is from the Lord, and also in the contrary sense, truth separated from good. And as truth is of faith and good is of charity, 'Peter' also means faith from charity, and again faith separated from charity. For the twelve apostles, like the twelve tribes of Israel, represented the church in respect to all things of it, thus in respect to truths and goods, since all truths are of faith, and goods are of love. In general, Peter, James, and John, represented faith, charity, and the works of charity; and this is why these three followed the Lord more than others . . . when they were together they represented these as one. It is said as one, because without charity there is no faith that is faith; and without works there is no charity that is

charity . . . Peter was the first to be called by the Lord through Andrew, 'Andrew' signifying the obedience of faith; and afterwards James and John were called, and to these the Lord gave a new name. Likewise He took Peter, James, and John up into the mountain when He was transfigured; He also spoke with these three about the consummation of the age, and about His coming; they were also with the Lord in Gethsemane . . . That the Lord gave a new name to James and John is evident in Mark: 'Jesus called James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James, and them he surnamed Boanerges, which is, sons of thunder' (3:17). 'Sons of thunder' signify truths from celestial good . . . As John represented the church in respect to good works, and good works contain all things of love to the Lord and of charity towards the neighbor, John was more loved by the Lord than the others."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Near what sea did the Lord make His home during His ministry? *Galilee*
J. What was the name of the place where He lived? *Capernaum*
P. Who were the first four disciples He called? *Peter, Andrew, James, John*
P. What was their occupation? *fishermen*
J. What were they doing when they were called? *working with their nets*
P. What words did the Lord use when He called them? *Follow me!*
P. What did they do immediately when He said, "Follow me"? *followed Him*
J. Of what three types of work did the Lord's ministry consist? *teaching, preaching, healing*
J. What kinds of ailments are mentioned in our lesson? *possession, lunacy, palsy*
J. Where did the great numbers of people come from who followed the Lord? *all over*
I. What does the sea represent? *knowledge gathered in the memory*
I. What do fish represent? *affection for such knowledge*
S. What is meant by being "fishers of men"? *to draw others into the Lord's kingdom*