
Preaching the Kingdom

Matthew 4:12-25

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Following a team...

Following someone on social media...

What does it mean to follow Jesus?

What does it mean to the world?

What does it mean to Christians?

What does it mean to *you*?

It Places (v.12-17)

Matthew opens his account of Jesus' ministry by telling us how Jesus moved from location to location.

¹² Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵ "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— ¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned."

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The Motivating Event (v.12)

The text here does not tell us why he was arrested, but history does. He was arrested and imprisoned in the dungeons of the fortress of Machaerus by Herod the king. His crime was that he had publicly denounced Herod for seducing his brother's wife, and making her his own wife, after he had put away the wife he had. It is never safe to rebuke a tyrant, and John's courage brought him first imprisonment and later, death. (Bruce)

The arrest of John seems to put Jesus on the move. Given what he does, that arrest halts John's public ministry. It is almost as though that was the signal for Jesus to begin his own. The baton almost seems to be passed. John has been the

proclaimer of the kingdom. Now, Jesus will be. The transition then is from one who was the prophetic messenger to the one who is the fulfilling King.

The New Location (v.12-14)

I am struck right away by all the places. Jesus is moving around. Matthew is writing something interesting and important. If you take a map of Israel of Jesus' day, you will find that all of the land of Israel is covered. We have Galilee in the northwest, the Decapolis in the northeast, Jerusalem and Judea in the southwest, and finally "beyond the Jordan," in the southeast. Jesus begins his ministry by preaching in what amounts to, all of the Promised Land.

Why did Matthew do this? Remember, with great skill and subtility, Matthew has shown how Jesus has fulfilled so much of the Old Testament, even in unexpected ways. He is the new Israel as shown in his following the pattern of Israel's out of Egypt, crossing the waters and into the wilderness of testing. So what is Jesus fulfilling here? Jesus is the new Joshua. He enters the promised land. He moves through the whole land and the kingdom is conquered by his presence and preaching. As MacDonald notes, "He is coming to reconquer the promised land and to rule it, to usher in a new and better kingdom, a heavenly kingdom (v. 17), drawing Jews from the north and south and east and west." Jesus has come into the promised land for the salvation of His people.

But what about Galilee? Galilee is mentioned in four verses – 12, 15, 23, and 25 and possibly in a fifth with the mention of the Sea of Galilee in verse 18. The most significant of these references is verse 15, where Matthew calls Galilee "Galilee of the Gentiles."

Barclay notes that Galilee "Originally had been assigned to the tribes of Asher, Naphtali and Zebulun when the Israelites first came into the land (Joshua 9), but these tribes had never been completely successful in expelling the native Canaanite inhabitants, and from the beginning the population of Galilee was mixed. More than once, foreign invasions from the north and east had swept down on it from Syria, and in the eighth century BC the Assyrians had engulfed it completely, the greater part of its population had been taken away into exile, and strangers had been settled in the land. Inevitably, this brought a very large injection of foreign blood into Galilee." (Barclay, p.92)

The New Testament teaches us that the gospel is for Jews first but then is also for Gentiles. All through the book of Matthew we will see the seed which was planted in Matthew 1:1-17, will take root, grow and finally bear fruit in the Great Commission. So Jesus starts his ministry in Galilee of the Gentiles. (adapted, MacDonald, p. 93)

The Prophetic Reason (v.15-16)

Matthew says that this movement through the land of Israel fulfills Isaiah 9:1-2 which he quotes. What are we always to do when we get an Old Testament

quote in a New Testament text? We go see why the author quoted it. Here is Isaiah 9:1-7:

9 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 Naph-tali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

² The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

³ You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

⁴ For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵ For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Matthew quotes the text from Isaiah to begin with Jesus being the new Joshua (9:1-2) followed by Jesus being the Divine Son (9:6) then to Jesus being King on the throne of the forever kingdom. How does the new Joshua conquer the promised kingdom for God's people? Through the sword? No, through the Word and Spirit, through preaching and power.

Darkness in Matthew is introduced as the absence of God's kingdom and the absence of God's king. This is a powerful indictment of the Jews. They who thought of themselves as the light of the world, were in fact, in great darkness. The

Mosaic Law could not bring that light. Their hearts were dark therefore their land was dark.

But Jesus has come. The King is here. The kingdom is near. The Word of the Lord and power of the age to come are bringing light into darkness. This is what the preaching of God's Word always does. In dark places and in dark hearts, the Word bring light and therefore, life. All that Jesus is in His Names, all that Jesus says in His Word, and all that Jesus does in His powerful works is bringing light into Israel. He is the fulfillment of the prophecy of the child, the one with these names and the establisher of the forever, heavenly kingdom.

This is our mission on this side of the cross and resurrection. We are the ones preaching the gospel of the kingdom. We are the ones whose words and whose resurrected lives witness to the light of the world. Our going and discipling will bring light into the darkness of people and places.

The Central Message (v.17)

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

This same message that John the Baptist was preaching. This is the beginning of the transition from the Old Covenant prophet to the New Covenant preaching. The message is the same in both... sinners must believe and repent. But in the Old, Jesus is anticipated. Now in the New, Jesus has come. We will see this often. Jesus is in the Old Covenant but He is the presence of the New. He is the new Israel, the new Joshua, the new Moses, and the new Kingdom.

The preaching has a clear call to repent. Repentance is a turning away from self-salvation projects of whatever kind they are and believing and bow to the Lord who saves.

The preaching declares that the kingdom of heaven is "at hand". The kingdom that is from heaven and is heavenly in its character is close, near, about to arrive. The Jews had their hope in Abraham, the Law and a future Davidic, earthly kingdom. They were full of darkness. Their very religiosity contributed to the darkness in their hearts. Jesus is not preaching so that they can add to, correct, enhance their religion by simply recognizing their sin. His is a call to a radical leaving of one and embracing another. This is what repentance means. It is a call to follow, to discipleship.

How do I know that? Because of what Matthew writes next...

Its People (v.18-22)

The kingdom is made up of citizens. It is made up of repenters. But for Matthew, the kingdom is made up of disciples. While Jesus is preaching to the crowds, He begins to gather His disciples.

¹⁸ While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he

said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ And 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, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

So, what are the marks of repentance, of becoming a disciple?

Hear the Sovereign Summons

Jesus is not speaking as just a rabbi, a traveling teacher or just a well-known preacher or healer. He speaks as the King. This is not merely an invitation. This is an imperative, a sovereign command. What is modeled here is primarily the response. But Matthew clearly sees Jesus as issuing a divine call, a kingly summons that will, by the grace of God, be responded to.

Matthew is reminding us that our own obedience to the great commission to make disciples means that there is the preaching of repentance and the reliance upon a Sovereign Lord to summon to salvation. We do our part. God does His part.

Respond to the Lord's Word

Jesus' sovereign summons is responded to. There is no salvation without believing and repenting. These men believe Jesus' command. How do we know? They follow in obedience. If they do not respond by following Jesus, then they are not believing, not repenting, not becoming disciples.

Discipleship is a commitment. It is not a second tier of super Christianity. It is basic Christianity. The sovereign's call to salvation is a call to discipleship. Any evangelism that does not have a discipleship trajectory is unbiblical and will lead to false professions and weak Christians. Jesus is modeling here, and Matthew is writing here to show us what the Great Commission actually sends us to do. Make disciples. And God's true people will respond in a way that moves them into following Jesus at any cost.

Move with Unhesitating Obedience

These men move with unhesitating, immediate obedience. This is a mark of a true disciple. Notice the repeat of the word, "immediate". They don't negotiate the terms. They don't seek for rational reasons to follow. They don't want to know what the reward will be (though later, they will do what all of us do and wonder...). They respond immediately.

Walk Away from the Old Life

These men were willing to leave their old lives. Now there is nothing wrong with work. There is nothing wrong and in fact, everything right about earning a living. We know Peter and other disciples were married and had families. Fishing was a good business. But they were willing to leave it if necessary to follow Jesus. This was a huge risk. But they did so anyway.

Matthew is pointing the church of his day and us to something else. We all had a life before faith, before conversion. Becoming a follower of Jesus means that we turn away and walk away from the old person, the old life. This is a picture of genuine repentance. Too much of what passes for Commissioned evangelism today is all about eliciting a minimal response on minimal truth with a minimal commitment. So all these people who still are not true disciples are trying to live the Christian life – it is no wonder they fail, they doubt, they leave.

Redeem the Skills Acquired

Jesus says that if they follow Him, He will make them to be fishers of men. One writer has pointed out that Jesus uses this analogy, not only because they are fishermen, but also because of the character and skills of an accomplished fisherman.

They must have *patience*.

They must learn to wait patiently until the fish will take the bait. If they are restless and quick to move, they will never catch anything. To become good at bringing people in, we will have need of patience. It is but rarely in preaching or in teaching that we will see quick results. We must learn to wait.

They must have *perseverance*.

They must learn never to be discouraged, but always to try again. Good preachers and teachers must not be discouraged when nothing seems to happen. They must always be ready to try again.

They must have *courage*.

As the old Greek said when he prayed for the protection of the gods, 'My boat is so small and the sea is so large.' They must be ready to risk and to face the fury of the sea and of the gale. Good preachers and teachers must be well aware that there is always a danger in telling people the truth. Those who tell the truth, more often than not, take their reputation and their lives in their hands.

They must have an eye *for the right moment*.

Through experience, they know that there are times when it is hopeless to fish. They know when to cast and when not to cast. Good preachers and teachers chooses the right moment. There are times when people will welcome the truth, and times when they will resent the truth. There are times when the truth will move them, and times when the truth will harden them in their opposition to the truth. Wise preachers and teachers know that there is a time to speak and a time to be silent.

They must fit the bait to the fish.

One fish will rise to one bait and another to another. Paul said that he became all things to all people if by any chance he might win some (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:22). Wise preachers and teachers know that the same approach will not win everyone. They may even have to know and recognize their own limitations.

They may have to discover that there are certain spheres in which they themselves can work, and others in which they cannot.

They must keep themselves out of sight.

If they make their presence too obvious or even show their own shadows, the fish will certainly not bite. Wise preachers and teachers will always seek to present men and women not with themselves but with Jesus Christ. Their aim is to fix people's eyes not on themselves but on that figure beyond.

These disciples become fishers of men. But it took the death and resurrection of Jesus and the descent of the Spirit to launch them out into the sea of humanity with the net of gospel.

Its Power (v.23-25)

The preaching of John the Baptist was in the mold of the Old Testament prophets. But Jesus' preaching fulfills the Old Testament prophecy.

²³ And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. ²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. ²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

In His Words (v.23)

Jesus is teaching and preaching. He goes into the synagogues where people are gathered to hear the Scriptures read and taught. His disciples go with Him. They observe how Jesus goes about it and this seems to inform their own methods of ministry as they take the gospel into the world.

Why the synagogues? They were the meeting places for Jewish people who were religious. Most communities would have had a synagogue. During the Exile they had become how Jewish people worshipped. It was the prototype for what became Christian assemblies. The synagogue service opened the door for the new teacher. In the synagogue service, there were three parts. The first part were the prayers. The second part were the readings from the law and from the prophets, often by members of the congregation. The third part was the address. There was no regular, assigned person to give the address. The leader of the synagogue, who presided over the service could ask any distinguished stranger to give the address. Anyone with a message might also volunteer and was allowed to speak if the leader thought him fit to do so. Thus, the synagogue and its pulpit were open to Jesus. After the address, there came a time for talk, and questions, and discussion. The synagogue was the ideal place in which to get a new teaching across to the people. (Barclay p. 93)

Jesus then is teaching and preaching. He does both. In doing so the King is teaching the truths of the Kingdom and preaching the call to repentance. He does so where God's people might gather. He launches his ministry in the synagogues.

But soon the press of the crowds will move him outside to the fields and hillsides.

In His Deeds (v.24)

Jesus' words are accompanied by mighty deeds of miracle working. He heals people of all kinds of diseases. His word is powerful to call disciples. His works are powerful for... well, what is really going on here?

There are lots of answers to that question. Most of the answers are reading back into the text what is not here. We know what Jesus is doing. But what is Matthew doing by this? How are healing and miracles a part of the kingdom of heaven being near? Is this just Jesus using His divine power to do good for people? Is this Jesus giving us an example that we should have the same powers in our ministries? Is Jesus giving us an example of doing good in society and culture even if people do not believe? Is Jesus establishing a pattern of Word and deeds that open the way to the gospel, that are bridge building?

Some of that is what is going on. But I believe the real answer is in this being an allusion to Isaiah 35:1-7.

35 The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus;
² it shall blossom abundantly
and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God.
³ Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
⁴ Say to those who have an anxious heart,
"Be strong; fear not!
Behold, your God
will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.
He will come and save you."
⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.
For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

They will see the glory of God, in Christ. Jesus fulfills this text as the glory of God in human flesh.

They will be saved by God, through Christ. Jesus fulfills this text by being the redeemer, the savior.

They will be healed by God, with Christ. Jesus fulfills this text bringing the heavenly kingdom to earth and begins the reversal of the fall and the curse.

What is the relationship to the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom from heaven marked by heavnliness? Matthew is using the Old Testament to point to what was beginning to be understood in the church through the preaching and teaching of the Apostle Paul. The powerful word and works of Jesus were the beginning of the in-breaking of the power of the new creation.

In His miracles, Jesus is showing that He is deity. He is God. He is who He says He is. He has the fullness of the Spirit and the approval of the Father. His power is the Divine power that saves souls and heals the sick.

In His miracles, Jesus is proving that He is the promised one. Every well taught Jew should have recognized Jesus' identity and unique credentials.

In His miracles, Jesus is beginning to reverse the fall and the curse. Matthew is hinting at it now. But this will unfold with ever increasing clarity through the book.

In His Following (v.25)

²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

Great crowds follow. Are they following like the disciples did? At this point, we may think so. We may hope so. But that is not the focus here. Matthew once again names localities that would highlight Jesus' travels. He begin by moving to conquer by words and works. He went through out the land of Israel but did much of His preaching in Galilee of the Gentiles. And great crowds come to Him from all of those regions.

The new Joshua has come. He has moved with preaching and healing power to begin His conquest. He summons disciples and has crowds of followers. The king is here. The kingdom is at hand. The kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. It is a heavenly kingdom. The King is human and deity. He has come to save His people from their sins. He has come to begin the new creation. He has come, not just for Jews, but for Gentiles.

Reflect and Respond

Two important considerations as we close.

What do you think about Jesus?

Have you truly become a disciple, a follower of Jesus?