

Matthew 4:12-25 – “Jesus’ Ministry Begins”

In Matthew 4:12 we begin to look at Jesus’ Galilean ministry. Now a whole year has passed between verses 11 and 12. This is Jesus’ first year of ministry where He performed miracles ministering both in Judea and Galilee. In that first year of ministry Jesus turned the water to wine in Cana, cleansed the temple in Jerusalem, visits with Nicodemus, ministers to the woman at the well in Samaria, among other things. John 1-4 covers this period of time, but Matthew jumps in to focus on Jesus’ Galilean ministry.

4:12 - *Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee.*

Matthew is going to focus a lot on the teachings of Jesus. That’s why we’ll be getting right into the Sermon on the Mount shortly. One of the greatest sermons preached. Jesus is able to have a lot more freedom teaching in the Galilean area without the heavy restraints and opposition of the religious leaders in Jerusalem and Judea.

Galilee was kind of like lake country [show map]. It’s where you’d go to just get away from the hustle and bustle. It’s where a lot of people settled to that weren’t interested in the religiosity of Judaism. Those in Jerusalem kind of looked down on people from Galilee as not being well educated.

And this is the place that Jesus will center on for His public ministry. He grew up in Nazareth, but Capernaum more or less became His headquarters of ministry.

But Matthew begins his recording of Jesus’ public ministry with the announcement of John the Baptist’s arrest and imprisonment. John is the forerunner. He’s preparing the way. And once the work of the forerunner is done, then the King can appear.

- John was put in prison for speaking out against Herod Antipas who was engaged in an adulterous relationship with his brother Philip’s wife.
- John never had a problem backing down from sharing the truth.
- We’re living in a day where it’s becoming far too common to be viewed as a risk or dissenter for speaking the truth. And sometimes just speaking things which runs contrary to what the popular narrative of the day is can land you in trouble, even jail as we’ve seen in recent times. We need to be wise in these days we live, but let’s never be afraid to speak the truth and to speak it in love.

4:13-16 - *And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ¹⁵ “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: ¹⁶ 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.”*

When it says that Jesus left Nazareth, Matthew leaves out some interesting info. We read in Luke 4:16-21 that Jesus stood in the synagogue and was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And He read from Isaiah 61:1-2:

- **Luke 4:18–19**, *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; ¹⁹ To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”*

Now this is a passage that Jews knew spoke of the coming Messiah and the ministry He would fulfill. After Jesus read it He sat down. And it says that every eye that was in the synagogue was fixed on Him.

And then Jesus said, *‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’* Bam! Mic drop moment. People were amazed. But as He continued to speak we read that many who were filled with awe began to be filled with wrath. So much so that they thrust Jesus out and led him to a high point of the hill in which Nazareth was built and attempted to throw Him off the cliff. But we read, *‘Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way’* (Luke 4:30).

- I love that. It was like Jesus’ attitude was, *It’s no big deal*. They just attempted to assassinate their Messiah, and He just moves on.
- Don’t let opposition set you back or discourage you. Just move on with Jesus. Just keep going His way and let Him work out those things.

So Jesus leaves Nazareth and comes to Capernaum. And doing so was once again to fulfill Scripture. This is a fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1-2.

This area that Jesus has come to was referred to as Galilee of the Gentiles. That’s because many people migrated here from the Roman Empire because of its beach town vibe. But it also had many people traveling through this area.

- Capernaum sits along the road, Via Maris, which is Latin for **‘Way of the Sea’**. This was a major Roman trading route running from Egypt to Babylon. Isaiah prophesies of the very name of the road that people will have their eyes opened to the way that God is working.

- You see Isaiah spoke these words to give hope and encouragement to the northern tribes of Israel who had undergone Assyrian invasion. Assyria would move people into the land and have people assimilate there breaking up the culture and identity of the nation. That's why it's referred to as ***Galilee of the Gentiles***. And because of this international highway, the Via Maris, many people of varied backgrounds would come through this area.
- But many who have been languishing in darkness will have an incredible opportunity to witness a great light through the life of Jesus Christ!
- Isaiah prophesied that thought things were dark, God had amazing plans of salvation. And now that salvation has arrived and is not in hiding, He is making Himself available as we see in this chapter.

And this light is available to all people! Jews and Gentiles. No one is excluded. No matter what you've done, or where you've come from, the offer of salvation is freely given.

- I'm so glad that God doesn't leave us in dark places. We've all felt the gloom of our own tragic mistakes and shortcomings as a shadow over us. We too dwelt in the land of the shadow of death. But God desires to take us out of that predicament. He desires to take broken people who are in need (and who acknowledge that need) and completely transform them. To shine His light in the darkness and remove that despair.
- And as Jesus sets up headquarters here, the testimony of Jesus will be carried out to all the regions of the known world as people pass by and witness the light of Jesus.

4:17 - *From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

Jesus continues on where John left off. He preaches the exact same message: ***Repent***. This is a call to action. Repent means to change your mind. But it's to have a change of mind in a way that changes your course. When Jesus says repent, it's a call not just to think differently about your sin, it's not just to leave your sin, it's to turn to Him for the salvation from sin. Change your course. We were dead in our sin and we see that our only hope is Jesus who has come to redeem us and deliver us out of our sin.

Now Mark's gospel says that Jesus came saying: *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel"* (Mark 1:15).

*Also in Matthew 4:23

Now that's an interesting thought. We know what the gospel is based on what Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 15:1–4**, *“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,”*

- We would say today that the gospel is that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. He died and rose again to show that His sacrifice was accepted, and He alone can now forgive us our sins. If you repent of your sin and believe in Jesus as your Saviour, you will be saved! (Romans 10:9-10).

But at this point Jesus hasn't gone to the cross or even proclaimed this as His mission. So, what's the gospel that Jesus is calling people to believe in? It's seen in the last part of Jesus' statement – the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Again, Matthew uses that term kingdom of heaven exclusively. It's synonymous with kingdom of God. And Jesus is stating that He has come to establish this kingdom. This is the fulfillment of what many Old Testament prophets wrote of and looked forward to. This is where the promises of God would come to fruition. This is where they would experience peace and prosperity. The Messiah would occupy the throne of David in Jerusalem and rule the nations in righteousness and justice.

- So those who accepted the gospel that Jesus spoke of were essentially surrendering to Jesus as the promised Messiah. It was an act of turning from faith in the law, to a place of submission to the rule and reign of Jesus as their King.
- Many got excited of this thinking this kingdom was going to happen physically in Jesus' day. Many became disillusioned and walked away when they saw Jesus handed over to the Romans and crucified. They failed to see that Jesus took this route to bring redemption to humanity, that we could be saved out of the kingdom of darkness and brought into the glorious kingdom of God; one that will be established physically and literally in this world when Jesus comes back again.

So for that message to spread, Jesus begins to select some disciples that will be instrumental in the sharing of this gospel.

4:18-20 - *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.*

Now this sounds pretty cool and amazing, like Peter and Andrew are seeing Jesus for the first time and they just drop everything and follow Him. Now that's faith! But this is not the first time they're meeting Jesus. In fact, they've already spent some considerable time with Jesus.

- They were with Him at the wedding in Cana when He performed His miracle. They've been with Him in Judea during the Passover. They were with Him after He ministered to the Samaritan woman at the well. They've spent time with Jesus.
- John's gospel records that Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist. He was with John when John proclaimed, "*Behold the Lamb of God!*" (John 1:36). And Andrew and another unnamed disciple followed Jesus. Jesus asked them what they're seeking, and they asked Jesus where He's staying? Jesus' response was come and see (John 1:39). That's so cool, Jesus just invites them into His life.
- Later Andrew went and brought Peter to Jesus. So, there's been some that have been tracking with Jesus. They've spent time with Him. But as they returned to Galilee they continued on in the previous things they were involved in.
- But now it seems Jesus is calling them to a specific and deeper calling. One which they are to leave all and follow Him.
- **Mark 3:13–14**, "*And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. ¹⁴ Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach,*"

So, when we read that they ***immediately left their nets and followed Him***, this is not some blind faith. This is not them being disgruntled with their choice of occupation. This is the response of two men who have seen something so attractive and so superior to anything else their doing that they are more than willing to leave all just to be with Jesus.

Have you experienced the blessing of being with Jesus? Have you discovered the quality of Jesus that makes life with Him far greater than any experience apart from Him? He is so worth following and living our lives for.

Now Jesus didn't call these guys because they were so together or skilled or just an obvious choice. These were guys that Jesus was going to disciple.

Notice, Jesus says, ***Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.***

These guys didn't know what being fishers of men were like. But Jesus was going to produce that in them.

It is interesting that Jesus turns around what they have been doing and does a new or greater work through them.

- Being fishermen took some skill, it took patience, it took knowing where the fish would be. These are things that will be helpful in being fishers of men. But Jesus didn't call them because they were already close to being who they needed to be.
- And in the same way, Jesus doesn't call us or save us because we were so good or saveable. He saves us because of His grace and He produces in us what He calls us to be. We're ***being*** transformed into the image of Christ.
- **Philippians 1:6**, *"being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;"*
- God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called.

4:21-22 - 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, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

Here's the dynamic duo of James and John. They were given the title Boanerges, which meant Sons of Thunder (Mark 3:17). They were explosive kind of guys. They were ready to call fire down on a Samaritan village because they did not receive Jesus (Luke 9:54). They had the audacity to ask Jesus to grant them the privilege to sit at His right hand and left in His glory (Mark 10:37). These were two guys you sort of had to keep your eye on. Yet, these are guys that Jesus called to Himself.

And they're two guys that Jesus used greatly. It's interesting that we see them not casting nets like Peter and Andrew, but rather ***mending their nets***. These are two that took on a very pastoral role. They would go about mending broken lives and seeing them restored through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- John particularly became known as the Apostle of love. And he shared often of the great love of God and the love we are to have for one another. He experienced this in Christ, and he knew the sweetness of fellowship with

Christ. He knew this is what mends the brokenness that people face through this world.

We read that they didn't just leave their boat, but they left their father. They were truly willing to forsake all for the sake of Christ. That's significant. How many would be willing to leave behind someone significant in your life to follow Jesus more completely and fully?

How many are willing to truly just leave yourself behind to follow Jesus? Have you counted the cost of discipleship? Have you surrendered your wants, your will, your aspirations to the Lord to say, whatever you have for me Jesus, I'm yours! (*Matthew 8:18-22; Luke 9:57-62)

You see, the stories of James and John are similar, but their outcomes are very different. James was the first of the disciples to be martyred; being beheaded by Herod (Acts 12:2).

John never faced martyrdom, though it was attempted against him. But he lived to an old age and continued to minister to the church.

- Now that's interesting to me. Did James deserve to die? Did John deserve to live longer? No. But this is what Jesus had for each of their lives.
- They both left all to follow Jesus. They both were faithful in what God had for them. But their outcomes were very different.
- When we follow Jesus, we're laying our lives down for Him to use us as He chooses. We're receiving the gift of eternal life, but we're also saying this present life is no longer ours, it's yours Jesus. And this life is meant to be lived solely for the glory of God. That means that if God allows some difficulty in our life, or calls us home at a young age, are we going to complain and be disgruntled with that? Or have we resolved that it's not about me, but about Him?
- What do you think the responses would have been if Jesus were to call James and John and tell them their future. James you're gonna be beheaded in a few years, and John, you're gonna live until an old age. I think James would have had some questions?
- I'm kind of glad God doesn't reveal to me everything He has planned in my life. But I want to live every day saying, Lord my life is yours. And whatever You choose to do in me and through me I know will ultimately be for your glory. So help me to receive everything by Your grace and for your glory!

I know that's easy to say, but I truly want to have that resolve in my life now. Because this life is not my own. It's been bought at a precious price. I know where I'm going, and that should be good enough for me.

- Can you say the same?

4:23-25 - *And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. ²⁴ Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. ²⁵ Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.*

So at the beginning of Jesus ministry, Matthew makes it clear that Jesus' ministry consisted of teaching and healing. In fact the next few chapters are broken down this way with Jesus' teaching emphasized in Matt 5-7 and His healings in 8-9.

As people heard of all that Jesus did many came to Him. And they came from great distances. This area covers around a 100 mile radius, taking days to travel by foot. So just remember that if your prone to complaining about your Sunday drive to church.

As we wrap this up the question for us is: Have you chosen today to follow Jesus? Have you counted the cost of discipleship?

Discipleship is truly costly, but it's worth every penny.

The more weighty question is, have you considered the cost of non-discipleship? You can choose to not follow Jesus, but do you know what you will be choosing? You will be choosing to die in your sin. "Eternity is at stake. The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23), and death apart from a saving relationship with Jesus Christ means that an eternal hell is your destination. Don't be deceived: the cost of non-discipleship is far greater than the cost of discipleship."¹

Are you following Jesus today? May we all be taking time to simply be with Him.

¹ Platt, D. (2013). *Exalting Jesus in Matthew* (D. L. Akin, D. Platt, & T. Merida, Eds.; p. 87). Holman Reference.