

01/22/23 Matthew 4:12-23 “Mission Begins with Calling”

Jesus Begins to Preach

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¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—
¹⁶ the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.” ⁿ

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Jesus Calls His First Disciples

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Jesus Heals the Sick

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ers, and will lead us to them or them to us.

ENTRANCE

We saw two weeks ago that after 30 long years of waiting for from unknown private life, Jesus launched His public ministry through His baptism. It was the summary of His mission, dying for the sin of the world and rising for life.

Today, we see the Lord entering the ministry in earnest. For that, He moves and recruits those to work with Him.. Where would be the appropriate place to do the work to spread the Kingdom’s Gospel? The City of Jerusalem and its temple. He visited there, and while staying in Judea for about

eight months, He met Nicodemus, called the first disciples, and baptized people with them. However, He spent two of third of His public life in Galilee.

From there, we see in today's text, 1) who are the main subject of the Lord's ministry (gentiles), 2) what His ministry was about (recovery), 3) with whom (unprepared disciples), and how He would do it, through which we hear His calling for you and me.

1. The main subject of the Lord's ministry

Let's see from **v12 When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee**. So, we see Jesus returned to Galilee, but the timing is after hearing John was arrested. He was imprisoned in Machaerus, Herod's palace-fortress, because John exposed and condemned Herod's wicked royal scandal, which everybody knew about, for taking his half-brother Philip's wife, Herodias, for himself.

The question is why Jesus wouldn't care about John, His forerunner, faithful and uncompromising prophet, but went to distant Galilee? It was not out of fear of Herod, as some think, because Galilee also was the territory under Herod's control, just like Perea, where John did his ministry and was arrested.

Using the passive voice shows that John's imprisonment was in God's divine plan and timetable. As he said, "Jesus must become greater and greater, and I become less and less" (John 3:30), John's role had now almost completed its service, which signaled the beginning of the King's. By divine determination, the Lord left Judea and went to the right place at the right time.

So, **v13 Leaving Nazareth**, His hometown Jesus **He went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake Galilee Sea in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—** Jesus came and settled in Capernaum, and it became His second home. (9:1).

Capernaum

Capernaum, located northwest of the Sea of Galilee, was the headquarters of the Galilee ministry, where He performed many miracles. By Jesus' day, it was a flourishing and prosperous city. A Roman garrison town, an administrative center, Matthew had his tax office there (Matt 9:9), and a customs station. About 1,000 people lived there at the time of Jesus. It was the fulfillment of what Isaiah prophesied eight centuries ago by the plan of God. **(to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:)**

V15 and 16 are its contents. **V15 "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—**

It shows the characteristics of Galilee. First, the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. They are the two tribes of Jacob allotted the northern part of the Promised Land. Nazareth was in Zebulun, and

Capernaum was in Naphtali. But, they failed to expel all of the Canaanites from their territories. So, from the beginning, there have been mixed marriages and the inevitable pagan influence. “Beyond the Jordan” means the west of the Jordan River, but here is from the point of view of the Assyria invaders from the Northeast.

Second, **the Way of the Sea** was known as a famous international trade route “via Maris,” which connects Asia Minor and down to Egypt, Africa. So, Galilee, as a trade center for foreigners and a place for information exchange, enjoyed prosperity. Galilee also was the breadbasket of central Palestine with extremely fertile soil, and the lake furnished great quantities of edible fish.

On the other hand, it was also the first to suffer damage when other nations, such as Assyria, Aram, and Babylon invaded. Galilee of the Gentiles has something to do with many non-Israelites residing in the region of Galilee.

In the eight century, B. C. the Assyrians took away a large part of those tribes as captives (2 Kings 15:29) and replaced them with Assyrians and other non-Jews. Through the centuries, the Jews that remained in Galilee had been greatly weakened in both biblical and traditional Judaism. In the 1st century, it was surrounded by the Gentiles: Syrians, Phoenicians, Decapolis, ten Greek cities to the southeast, and Samaria. Therefore, Galilee was largely under foreign control and populated by non-Jews. That’s why “Galilee of the Gentiles” is translated as “Galilee under the rule of the Gentiles.”

The Jews in Jerusalem looked down on those in Galilee not only geographically distant from Zion but also thinking they were not strictly observant of the law, as said, “Surely the Messiah doesn’t come from Galilee, does He?” (John 7:41).

On the other hand, the Jews who lived in Galilee were less sophisticated and traditional than those in Judea. Josephus, who at one time was governor of Galilee, observed that Galileans “were fond of innovations and by nature disposed to change, and they delighted in seditions.”

Ordinary people

When I was thinking of them, I felt like they were ordinary people just like us, living in a thriving place centered on various jobs: agriculture, fishing, and trade, cherishing their families, living with their own dreams and hopes in life, pursuing prosperous and happy life, and doing the things they love, etc.

However, the evaluation of the Bible on them may be something they could never have imagined hearing in their lives. **V16 the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.**” So, their lives were living in darkness and the land of the shadow of death.

Even if they might be good children or parents, friends and neighbors who live ordinary lives, faithful and diligent, their spiritual condition was completely different. They didn't have God in them and were slaves to sin, living in pursuit of wrong desires. They might have spiritual longings but still were spiritually dead and lived without the essential needs of their life and soul. I was glad and sympathized with one of our church members when he asked a prayer that his great-great-children may seek God. Yes, those people are our concerns and our subjects of care.

A Great Light

To those living in darkness, the Messiah came as a great light! As He said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow Me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life." (John 8:12), when the great Light comes, those who dwell in darkness and death will come to life.

Example) Jesus has been the light for me too. My life was so dark until I was 16, but it changed when I met the Lord Jesus. My future began to look bright for the first time, and the world as well. For six months, I felt the whole world, trees, mountains, birds, and the sky look like they were praising God.

The fact that Jesus began His ministry in a nontraditional mixed multitude of Galilee, to those despised, sin-darkened, and rebellious Galileans rather than those in Jerusalem, the queen city of the Jews and Judea, learned, pure, and proud, emphasizes the fact that His gospel of salvation was for the whole world.

In fact, we all were like Galileans living in darkness and the shadow of death. Are we not? Is there any Jew among us? Gentiles, foreigners, should've been what we are called by the Jews. However, the Son of God was sent to Galilee to be "a light of the revelation of the Gentiles", you and me. It was there that His ministry decisively developed and began to spread.

2. What His ministry is about (restoration)

V17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Notice that the way the Lord delivered the message was to preach, not to argue, reason, dispute, or convince by intellectual proof. The word "preach" in Greek (*kēryssō*) was used to describe official pronouncements of a sovereign, just like God in the Bible does not prove Himself but proclaims who He is. It means the Lord's message was certain because He told only what He had seen in His Father's presence. (John 8:38), God the Father's message to all those living under darkness and death.

It also unlike their teachers of religious law, with authority, as He said, "I don't speak on My own authority. The Father who sent Me has commanded Me what to say and how to say it." (John 12:49) Therefore, anybody who hears this message of Jesus Christ proclaimed must make a decision either believe the truth or refuse to believe it.

Repent & the Kingdom of God

Then, what is the message? **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”** Repentance and Heaven are linked. Only those who repent can enter the country. Biblically, repentance is synonymous with accepting the gospel. (Matt 1:15). Repentance presupposes faith, and faith is a concept that describes repentance positively. As the word repentance, “Metanoe” literally means a change of perception, a change in the way we see something; it is not a one-time decision or experience but should continue in our daily lives.

It is returning to God continuously from life without God and worldly desires, filling myself with God’s Word, and determining my daily feelings and attitudes by obeying God’s will. By doing so, let the reign of God’s Kingdom continue to take place and grow within me.

The difference in focus to the Baptist’s message

While it is the same message as John the Baptist, the Gospel of Jesus is centered on restoration, salvation, and healing, not like John’s judgment. Therefore, the ministry of the Lord accompanies the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom and the ministry of healing all diseases and weaknesses.

It is for the restoration of freedom, blessing, and salvation for those living without God. One of my meditations last week was Psalm 119:68, which says about God: **“You are good and do only good.”** By remaining in it, I was reminded and enjoyed how fortunate, thankful, and happy I was to know and live in a relationship with such a God. Repentance, turning to God, continually brings us to God’s Kingdom.

3. With whom He works

By the way, before Matthew says v23, the summary of the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus that will unfold in Galilee, we see the Lord call the two sets of brothers to Himself.

V18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

It was one way to fish by throwing a net cast from the shallow water along the shore.

That means that while they were working hard, the Lord called, as did the other two disciples.

V21 Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Repairing the nets was a routine but important task in the fishing business.

You better not think that they were poor and insignificant fishermen. In the 1st century, the Galilee Sea fishery was prosperous and sold to Alexandria, Egypt, and Antioch, in Syria. They had their own boat, and James and John had even hired workers.

Calling them, the Lord says, **v19 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”** Jesus called them the partners of His ministry. That is to fulfill the Great Commission, making disciples of all nations. From the beginning of His ministry, He planned to use disciples to win disciples.

Think about it. Should He need them? Or couldn't He accomplish His mission without them? NO. He could've done it alone, which probably would be a simple and easy way to do it; however, He never intended to do it alone.

Then, why did He want to work together with them? It is the same applied to us. First, it is what God pleases. Paul says, “God was pleased... through using our foolish preaching to save those who believe.” Second, it is to give the privilege and benefit to them of participating in God's work to those who obey and share His joy with them.

As I shared before, I was a leader who trained young people to participate in preaching the gospel in the mission abroad. Although there were times when I was so proud of the results of the amazing ministry, many miracles, and the number of conversions, God made me know that it was not due to the dedication or hard work of myself or the team members. Because we were just ordinary Christians.

I realized later that when we obey the Lord and give our time, money, and talents, God uses us as His instruments for the needs of His people that were lost souls. Yet, we all remembered what Daniel said, “Those who are wise will shine as bright as the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever.” (Dan 12:3).

Therefore, please remember that even for your benefit, God calls you and me to be a fisherman.

The characteristics of the Lord's calling

The Lord's calling is simple, but there are crucial things we need to know.

First, unlike other disciples at that time, who went to the teacher they wanted to learn, to know more about the law, and when they achieved their goal, they went to learn from other rabbis, the Lord Jesus individually selects those He wants to be His disciples, by visiting their lives and calling them.

It means that Jesus' call to be a disciple and to make disciples is not something you decide by yourself or by me, a pastor, exhort you to do, but it was initiated by your Savior and Lord. It is His demand or command. Jesus told His disciples, “You did not choose Me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit” (John 15:16).

Second, we must remember that the calling here was the second. As I already mentioned, the first call at the place of John the Baptist's ministry was for salvation, to faith in the Messiah (John 1:35-51; 2:11). After that, they were with the Lord in the Jerusalem temple and even baptized many

people. However, it was like a part-time disciple. When Peter, James, and John returned home, they were again back fishing. So, at the Sea of Galilee, the Lord Jesus repeated the call to be fishers of men, and the disciples then realized the call was permanent, and it was the calling to witness.

It is the same for all believers. When Jesus called us to Himself, He also called us to call others. The disciples are not only called to be the new people of heaven but also to call others to be the kingdom's people.

God similarly calls all believers. First, He calls us to salvation. He then calls us progressively to more specific and ever-expanding service. The work of fishing men and women is the greatest work the church is called by God to do. We are called to be a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation, a kingdom of His witnesses to the world to draw all mankind to Himself.

This does not mean everyone should be a pastor or a missionary like me. However, being a disciple and making a disciple, there is no part-time. I am called full-time to equip you with the Word, but just as I still live as a disciple of Jesus in my family and relationships with my neighbors, all of us are disciples called by the Lord in every position and place of our lives, fishers of people.

Third, it is crucial to note that by commanding "follow ME," the Lord makes Himself the goal of learning, not the law. In other words, the object that the disciple should learn is Jesus Himself. Following the Lord is not to learn more doctrine or to improve ourselves, but to start something completely new, to become something new.

And thus, all teachings to the first disciples began in fellowship with the Lord Jesus. They saw Him and believed Him. They believed and thus learned the truth connected to Him and springing from Him. In other words, the seed of truth fell in their hearts fell from the flower of the Lord's personality and life. Therefore, following Jesus as His disciples mean committing to imitate Christ we follow. Paul says, "Let us grow in every way into Him who is the head-Christ" (Eph 4:15).

Last, Jesus the Lord did not simply command His disciples to become fishers of men but promised that He would make them fishermen of souls. Even after He left them permanently on their own, the Lord promised that through His presence with them.

The Great Commission of Jesus Christ for all the believers, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations..." in Matthew 28:19 is like the filling, together with v18 and 20 like two slices of bread, makes a Sandwich. Two slices are the promise of the Lord: He says in v18 "I have given all authority in heaven and on earth," and v20, "And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." He empowers His disciples to make a disciple.

The response of the disciples

Are you a disciple? As a disciple, are you doing the work of making disciples at home, at work, and in relationships with others? If not, why? Are you lacking in gifts or qualifications? Need more training and preparation? We learn from their reactions. If we think about them, they actually look like those who are completely unprepared for the calling of the Lord.

They were selfish, proud, weak, and cowardly. None of them at this time had a passion for souls or a passion for any part of the Lord's work. However, to the calling of the Lord, **v20 At once Peter and Andrew they left their nets and followed him.** James and John as well, **v22 and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.**

As urgent and radical as the Lord's commands are, so are the disciples' reactions. Abandoning the nets means abandoning their job, way of life, and material possessions to follow the Lord. James and John abandoned even their father, which may be the greatest pain one will experience when following the Lord, and it is the same pain for their family.

Knowing Christ enough enables obedience.

What made them obey immediately and radically that calling? So deep was their faithful trust and sincere attachment to the Lord that they left boats and family and followed Him in unquestioning trust, absolute simplicity, and total self-denial.

In Luke's gospel, after teaching the crowd on the shore from Simon's boat, Jesus instructed the disciples to go out to the deep water and let down their nets for a catch. We know the story. Peter caught nothing through a full night of fishing yet obeyed nonetheless. The catch filled both boats so that they almost sank with the weight of the fish.

Simon intuitively realized who Jesus was— in the presence of the holy God, who could see right through the bottom of the lake under the water and see through to the deepest depths of his heart. At this time, they had little knowledge of Jesus' teaching or what following Him would cost. But it was enough for them to know who He was and that His call to them was a divine call.

Are you a disciple of Christ? Do you live as fishers of the people, living and calling those in darkness and the land of the shadow of death?

CONCLUSION

After calling and receiving the four disciples, Matthew recorded what the Lord Jesus did by traveling throughout the region of Galilee.

V23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

In all of the Lord's teaching, proclaiming, and healing, we can imagine His disciples, unprepared to be His disciples in many ways, there with Him, participating in Him. I think this is the same scene we see. Our Lord still is alive, who works in us and the world, yet He does all that by calling us and placing us by His side. Only those who love Jesus Christ believe in Him as their Savior and Lord and thus obey Him, He will make them the fishers, empower them and be with them as He promised. So, why wouldn't you trust Him and accept His calling?