

"Follow Me"

Matthew 4:12-25

Here in Matthew 4 we read about Jesus' temptation in the wilderness in vv.1-11. Matthew, Mark and Luke record this happening after Jesus' baptism by John the Baptizer. John the gospel writer doesn't even mention it. Immediately, Matthew jumps from Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (which took place in the Judean wilderness) to Jesus' ministry in Galilee. And if we don't read John, we think Jesus called His first disciples cold turkey the first time He meets them. Which we know isn't true because John gives us info prior to this about Jesus' ministry starting in the Jordan Region near Jericho, where He first met Andrew, Simon, Phillip and Nathaniel. What were these guys who were from Galilee doing in the south? Following John the Baptist's message about the Messiah.

John then gives us numerous accounts from John 2-3 that the others don't because Jesus is making His way to Galilee and John the Baptist has not been arrested yet. Matt. 4:12 picks up Jesus' ministry in Galilee after John has been arrested. But the core group of Jesus' disciples has not been settled yet. As they return home to Galilee we see Simon and Andrew resuming their livelihood and we're introduced to John and James, also fishermen.

Last week we saw how Jesus first introduced Himself to the would-be disciples through invitation. Come and see. Come hang around with Me, listen to what I say, watch I do and how I live. See for yourself.

And now some of these have been with Jesus for a bit and are travelling back home to Galilee. They're processing all they've seen and heard. They all go home [Jesus too; we'll talk about next week], get back into their lives and families. They witnessed some miracles, heard about Jesus' chat with Nicodemus [we'll come back to that], and were with Jesus when He met the Samaritan woman [we'll come back to that too]. All of these represent different people who were in different places in their lives regarding their understanding of who Jesus is. Jesus' approach to all of them is different. Which makes sense. Some people have had lots of interaction with Jesus, others have not. Some people have extensive knowledge about Jesus, while others don't. How do we approach all of these people and engage them in a way that draws them to Jesus? We're going to look at how Jesus did it. And to those who've seen and heard plenty now to make a decision, Jesus confronts them directly to follow Me.

Most of us have made that decision to follow Jesus. How do we do that if we are to make fishers of men like Jesus did? Let's learn three things from Matthew 4:12-25. Followers of Jesus ...

Need to Have a Repentant Spirit to See Where Jesus is Working(4:12-16)

John the Baptist has been arrested. What was His message? "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is near". The kingdom means the rule of God. Why is it near? Because the King is near, He's just disguising His royalty and deity according to Phil. 2. John was preparing the way for God's anointed. While the people are thinking the kingdom is going to come with force and overthrow Rome and make wholesale social changes, Jesus' kingdom is coming with Holy Spirit power that will make spiritual changes in individuals' lives. But you can't see where Jesus is working if you're not spiritually in tune. So we need to repent. Let's go back and see what John meant in Ch.3.

⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

"Repent" means to turn your mind around in the opposite direction. Since we are all sinners we need to confess that and believe Jesus is the King of the world by faith, even though we do not see all things subjected to Him yet (Heb. 2:8). We need to believe that He alone can forgive our sins because He paid for them on the cross. Every person needs to repent because

We're surrounded by darkness (vv.12-16a)

Matthew tells us Jesus left Nazareth (why was He there? We'll find out next week!) and moved to Capernaum, home of Peter and Andrew and probably a few others. Matthew points out from Is. 9 that Galilee is the tribal territory of Zebulun and Naphtali. These people were living in spiritual darkness. The northern tribes were less faithful to God than Judah and Benjamin in the south. The Northern tribes never had a godly king rule them since the days of Solomon and David when they were united. There were more Gentiles in the north as well, even though Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida were Jewish strongholds with many synagogues and Rabbis. Most of whom were in darkness too because they rejected Jesus as the Messiah.

John announced the Messiah has come, the One Isaiah prophesied who would be born to them but also a Son given to them. John pointed Jesus out to people and that they needed to acknowledge they were in spiritual darkness and the only way out was to accept the light that Jesus was and came to give.

Repentance means change the way you live by changing how you think. 'Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.' The evidence of spiritual change is visible change. I don't change because I want to do better, I change the way I live because now I believe who rules the world and I am accountable to Him one day. Even then, He forgave me all my sins and now I want to let Him change me by the things he tells me to do in His Word. Even though we're surrounded by darkness,

Yet Jesus' presence can be seen through the eyes of faith (vv.16b-17)

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."*

¹⁷ *From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."*

Only those who understand they are in darkness and have repented of their sins and trust in Jesus see the light. But repentance is an attitude not a one-time action. Often we miss seeing where Jesus is working because we're selfish and more focused on living our life rather than the one Jesus wants us to have. If we recall our passage last week, there's a great illustration. Last week we were in John 1, where Jesus first invited Andrew, Simon, Philip and Nathaniel to come and see what He was all about. Nathaniel was amazed that Jesus knew where he was (under a fig tree) even though he wasn't present. Jesus said to him,

⁵⁰ *Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that."* ⁵¹ *He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."*

Jesus was referring to Jacob's dream, when he left home to go to Padam Haran to find a wife from his grandpa's family. After Jacob had deceived Esau of the blessing, God Himself appeared to him in a dream in a place Jacob would call Bethel, house of God. In that dream God reassured Jacob that the promises to Abraham would come true through their descendants. God reminded Jacob He would bless the world through his descendants. In that dream God appeared at the top of the staired ramp leading to heaven, where angels were ascending and descending to earth from heaven, as a word picture that God was accomplishing his will on earth. Jacob wakes up and says, 'Surely God is in this place and I was unaware of it.'

Nathanel essentially says the same thing about Jesus, who is God come to earth in the flesh to show the world that heaven has come to earth and God is still blessing the world through a descendent of Abraham. But we don't always have our eyes of faith open to see God and Jesus working around us. That's why we need to have a repentant attitude because sin blinds us from seeing God's hand in this place and other places. The kingdom of heaven is near. Heaven has come down. You're going to see examples of God's presence in this place and in this place and over here, but you have to walk by faith to see it.

So everyone has come back home. Jesus went to Nazareth but is now settling in Capernaum. The others have returned too, back to their livelihoods and routines. I believe Luke 5 and Matthew 4 are the same passage. Matthew leaves out Luke's details. Jesus comes to where the disciples have been fishing. It's morning and Jesus starts to teach. Crowds gather. Jesus asks Peter if he can use his boat to preach from. The fishermen are on the shore because they fished all night and it was a bad night for fishing. After Jesus finishes preaching he tells Peter 'Let's go fishing'. Peter, the seasoned fisherman tells Jesus we didn't catch a thing last night (the best time for fishing) which explains the detail about washing their nets in Matthew – but he says 'Master ... because You say so I will let down the nets'. Without knowing John 1 was the first encounter with Peter, and Peter and the others coming back with Jesus to Galilee hearing Him teach already, explains Peter's willingness to listen to Jesus and voila, the miraculous catch! And then we read in Luke 5:8

⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

They leave everything and follow Jesus, Matthew includes, but some of the details are left out, and now it makes more sense when we put these accounts together. So they've seen Jesus work, heard Him speak, spent time with Him and just witnessed a miracle and Jesus now calls them to follow Him. And they do because

They Separate Themselves from Obstacles that [Can] Hinder Commitment (4:18-22)

What obstacles?

Anxiety over meeting our needs (vv.18-20)

They left their nets, their livelihood. Yes they had already been with Jesus perhaps for a couple of weeks already but they must have had some resources already to get by since they had travelled to see John the Baptist. But now they had to get back to work, feed their families, meet their needs. Jesus says 'Follow Me and I will make you people catchers for the kingdom.'

As disciples of Jesus we are called to trust God to meet our needs, whatever they are. Material, physical, emotional. What do you get anxious about? Money? Housing? Friends? Children? Do we believe God's promises to meet our needs are actually true, or do we have our own version of Prov. 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

'Lean on your own understanding to straighten your paths and if that doesn't work try trusting God.' Trust and Lean are synonyms for faith. Trust in the Lord, lean not on your own understanding. How limited is your understanding of your circumstances compared to God's unlimited understanding of your circumstances? We're not to lean on our own understanding because we can't see past this moment, but God's ways are higher [better perspective] and He sees the end from the beginning.

The disciples leave their livelihood and trust Jesus. And they leave their families which is another potential hindrance to obeying God.

Fear of disappointing family (vv.21-22)

It's interesting that we are told Zebedee was right there. Mark adds that

They left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

That means Zebedee had a thriving business. Maybe he just assumed James and John would take over. They just left. Peter was married. How hard was that? Did they have their parents and wives' blessing? Maybe. Praise the Lord when that happens. But sometimes we don't. Even from Christian parents. I am convinced God is going to have a chat with some parents who hindered their children from doing what He wanted them to do because they wouldn't let them go. How often do we not even now put family ahead of God? Look at Luke 9:57-63

⁵⁷As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." ⁵⁹He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." ⁶⁰Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." ⁶¹Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." ⁶²Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Two of these examples of unwillingness to commit were because of family. One said when he was done his obligation of looking after his father until his death, then he would get serious about God. When things slow down, when the kids are out of high school or sports, when things are convenient for me ...

The other one wanted to say goodbye to his family, but Jesus indicated you can't have divided loyalties. Because when you go back, you'll have second thoughts. They'll try to convince you not to be so serious about Jesus. Even the disciples struggled with this because Peter himself says to Jesus shortly after the rich young ruler refused Jesus' invitation to follow Him,

²⁷Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" ²⁸Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred

times as much and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

God and Jesus know our needs and will meet them here and in eternity. Every sacrifice we make for God will be remembered and rewarded in God's way and in His time and we will be satisfied. Which brings us to a third reason why we should follow Jesus. We follow Him because we

Believe that the Joy of Seeing Changed Lives Satisfies You More than Anything (4:23-25)

How does Jesus change lives? Matthew's summary gives us the two major ways:

By the power of the Word of God (vv. 23a, 25)

Jesus went out teaching in their synagogues. Through preaching, God's word spread beyond Israel; east to the Decapolis, north to Syria, and south to Jerusalem of course.

Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

All of us have had our lives changed by the power of the Word of God. We've made life decisions based on faith in what God says. Paul said about the Thessalonians in 1 Thes. 1:2

² We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. ³ We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere.

We read it, are challenged by it through the power of the Spirit and we make life choices based on what God says. That's amazing! Spiritual growth is amazing and it's miraculous because it's not of human origin.

By the power of the miraculous (vv.23b-24)

Jesus performed miracles to show people heaven and earth were converging. God's will was being accomplished so we could say 'surely God is in this place and praise the Lord He gave me eyes of faith to see it.

Isn't an answer to prayer a type of miracle? You call on God who we can't see, about a need maybe we can't even see and only hear about, and He answers! He heals on a small scale and on a large scale. I love hearing testimonies of people who were diagnosed with something and later on it's gone and the doctors can't explain it. But don't belittle smaller healings and answers to prayer. God loves doing things on a small scale, too and appreciates it when we give Him all the glory even for things most people would not give Him credit for.

The kingdom has yet to fully come and will do so when the King returns. But the kingdom is always near because God is accomplishing His will all around us. He's still sending angels to do His

work. He's still showing us His power through every godly decision we make and every answer to prayer. Pray 'Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven' more often and ask God to help you be more alert to see heaven and earth converge so that we can be amazed like Jacob and Nathaniel and say 'God is in this place too and I wasn't aware of it at first but thank you for letting me see Your hand Lord.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message, please
contact us at olivet@rideau.net