

The King's Ministry (Matthew 4:12-25)

None of us like to be told what we do, but when we are, we look for two factors... their authority, and their motivation. We've probably all at some point said to someone, maybe to our parents... who are you to tell me what to do? That never goes over well. In that statement there's a world of misunderstanding about parental authority, as well as their motivation to love and care for you. Though we hated it at the time, we should now be thankful for the discipline we received as children. Our obedience hinges on our understanding of authority and that authority's motivations for us. The greater authority we ascribe, and the greater we see the authority acting for our well-being, the greater and more joyful is our submission and obedience.

When we come to text today in Matthew chapter 4, Jesus begins His ministry, and that is going to involve commanding and demanding some difficult things. But Matthew is not placing the ministry of Jesus outside of the foundation of His identity. He's been making a case for Jesus' authority and goodwill toward us. We might be tempted to say, "Who are you to tell me what to do?" and Matthew has already given us the answer. Let us therefore review before we look at Jesus' hard teaching.

In chapter 1 we see Jesus as the promised Messiah, as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises, as the Creator and the One to initiate a new created order. We saw that He is the True King, Priest, and Prophet. We see that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine, the Godman, whose blood alone is sufficient to save. We see that He is the Immanuel, God with us, Our representative.

In chapter 2 we see that Jesus is inaugurating a new exodus out of slavery to sin, He's the cosmic deliverer, He is the one to remove the shame and suffering of exile out from God's presence. We also see pictures of His sovereignty and His love.

In chapter 3 we see Jesus as the Savior King, Suffering Servant, the Righteous Judge, and the One who purifies. He's the resurrection and the life. We see Jesus declared to be the Son of God, pleasing to the Father, and filled with the Holy Spirit.

In chapter 4 we see Jesus as the faithful one to withstand temptation in the wilderness, the Victorious One, the new and better Adam and the new and better Israel, The bread of Life, our Provision, and the Word made flesh. In the 2nd part of chapter 4 where our text begins today, Matthew continues his introduction about Jesus' identity.

We read...

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."

Matthew shows us that Jesus again is fulfilling prophecy. The situation of this scripture is Isaiah 9:1-2 prophetically speaking to the Jews, and it's context is helpful. Isaiah 8 prophecies judgement on the people, and Isaiah 9 prophecies salvation for the people that would come through a baby, whose name would be "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." This is Jesus.

These Jews were dwelling in darkness, dwelling in the shadow of death. This was their residence, their condition, and there was nothing they could do to about it. They were looked down on by others—they were mixed, multi-ethnic, and lacked the purity the Jews celebrated. Their physical situation was a picture of their spiritual reality. Far away from the purity and blessing of Jerusalem in the world of the Gentiles is like saying far

away from God. The ultimate point is their sin has broken fellowship with God and landed them under God's wrath—that's a dark situation. And that is the situation of not only Jew, but all humanity.

Isaiah prophecies into this darkness, "to a people dwelling in darkness, in the shadow of death, on them a light has dawned." A light shines into the dark world of the sinner, epitomized by the broken, weak and outcasts of the world.

That light is none other than Jesus Christ. Here we see Him as the light of the world that overcomes the darkness, and we see Him as the hope for all nations, both Jew and Gentile.

Matthew in his introduction has painted us a magnificent portrait of the nature and identity of Jesus. And it's this understanding that we must bring to v.17 where Jesus' ministry begins. We are going to look at three aspects of His ministry: His message, His strategy, and His goal.

Let's pray.

The King's Ministry: His Message

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

The King is here. We've seen His virgin birth, His supernatural baptism, and His defeat of Satan in the wilderness. He finally opens his mouth to preach, and what does He say? "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This was not the only words he used, but it summarizes his message—and it's loaded with meaning.

The first word we see is "repent." This is the one action that summarizes what Jesus commands of us.

What does repent mean?

I'd like to put forward John Piper's definition of repentance. He says to repent is "to be changed deep within. (To) replace all God-dishonoring, Christ-belittling perceptions and dispositions and purposes with God-treasuring, Christ-exalting ones." -John Piper

To say it more simply, to repent is to stop worshiping false gods and to start worshiping the True God. Piper is right to locate worship at the heart level, it's much deeper than behavior, it gets down into the stuff of what we value, prioritize, trust in, hope in, and treasure.

Repentance is different than the fruit of repentance. We saw this in Matt. 3:8, "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance." The fruit of repentance is outward behavioral change. So repentance is about getting a new root system.

For example, sometimes we may think to repent of getting drunk is to stop getting drunk. Repentance in that situation is to change your view of alcohol—instead of seeing alcohol as your savior and worthy of worship, you now see Jesus as your savior and worthy of worship. In that way, worship of God is restored—that's repentance. And out of that repentance flows a life of sobriety as the fruit of that repentance.

It's entirely possible to stop getting drunk without ever repenting. You've traded one idol for another. Instead of Alcohol, now it's your accountability program, your business, or your own strength—Jesus is still not worshiped. That's mere behavior modification, and what the pharisees were great at, causing Jesus to call them white washed tombs—looked great on the outside but were full of death.

So Jesus' primary message to us is repent... to experience a change at the deepest level of our hearts and minds, to view and treasure God as supremely valuable and worthy.

But why do we need to repent? He tells us, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

It's too bad if this stirs up images of the picketers, with their signs, turn or burn, or get right or get left. Often times that's nothing more than hate and judgement wrapped in a veneer of truth, devoid of love and grace.

The command to repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand is full of grace. In v.23 another description of Jesus' preaching it says he proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom... that is, the good news of the kingdom. It's good news. Sure it involves recognizing sin, but it's good news to sinners. Jesus came to call the sinner not the righteous (or those that thought they were righteous).

And we just read that a "light" is shining on a whole world that was sitting in darkness. There is good news all over this, so we should see grace here.

1. God's gracious warning of judgement (what makes repentance urgent)

It is a gracious measure of God that He would break into our lives and reveal to us that there is a coming judgement. It's a grace when you go into the Doctor's office thinking all is well and he tells you you have a tumor that demands immediate extraction, and you would have died if they didn't catch it. The Word of God tells us that God is infinitely holy and that it has been appointed that every man must stand before Him and give an account of their life—with failure in one matter of the law enough to sentence you to an eternity of punishment. This is the coming wrath of God, and no man can escape it, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

If the Holy Spirit has convicted you of sin and made you aware of the judgement to come, God has been gracious to you.

2. God's gracious offer of salvation (what makes repentance possible)

It is gracious for the Doctor to tell you you are sick, it's another grace for the Doctor to give you the cure. Jesus is the cure for sin. Without Jesus, repentance to righteousness is not possible. Our judgement is due He is the One who shields us from the wrath to come by taking the wrath on Himself. He lives the life we could never live and dies the death we deserved, in our place. It's gracious because we had nothing to do with it. While we were sinners, Christ died for us. He who knew no sin became sin for us, that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

We must turn away from trusting in ourselves for salvation and to trusting in God for salvation. When that happens, the Bible teaches, we become new creations, the old is gone, the new has come, we are born again, with a new nature that is righteous and pleasing to God (though we still struggle with sin, we are no longer defined or condemned by it).

So we are back to where we started, repentance is the deep change of the heart, made possible by the blood of Christ, whereby we become a new creation in Christ, that rightly worships God. For believers, the kingdom of God is no longer something to be feared, it's something to hope in, long for, and pray for it's coming.

Have you repented of sin and placed all your trust in Christ for salvation?

The King's Ministry: His Strategy

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.

The pattern for discipleship presented. The clear command in this passage to the disciples was for them to follow Jesus, with the clear correlation, that if they follow Jesus, He will make them fishers of men. The connection couldn't be any tighter.

a. Jesus works through people

Though following Jesus would imply learning everything from him, walking in holiness and righteousness, here the clear emphasis is on doing work. Holy Work. Taking part in the same work that the Savior is taking part in. It's joining up with the mission of God and doing the mission of God. Jesus chooses to do His work through His people. From the beginning we see this is the pattern.

What is the nature of this work? Fishing for men? What is that all about?

The work of fishing is the work of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, calling others to repent in light of the coming kingdom (Mt. 13). This was the work of John the Baptist. It was the work of Jesus, and it is our work today as the church and as His disciples. "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47). One scholar put it this way, instead of pulling fish out of the water to die, they are called to pull dead men out from the wrath of God that they may live.

That's the nature of our work. Though we are not the ones who accomplish salvation, we are the ones through whom God is speaking His gracious offer of salvation.

"18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." 2 Cor. 5:18-20

Jesus, the sovereign One, could have used any means to carry out His mission, but He chose to use people. He chose to use us.

We are His plan A and there is no other. People are saved from the fires of God's wrath as we open our mouths and live our lives as witnesses to the good news.

That might fill us with pressure and fear, but if so, then we have misinterpreted what Jesus is calling us to.

b. Working for Jesus is a gift to be embraced

It's important to notice that Jesus chooses the disciples, they do not choose Him. The language of follow me is discipleship language. Be my disciple. This is radically different from how it normally happened in the culture. Typically a disciple finds a rabbi or teacher and asks if they can be discipled. Jesus choosing them is a measure of grace. He chooses as He wills.

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit." John 15:16

Our hearts being sinful do not deserve Jesus to call us nor are we even desiring it, yet He comes to us and calls us. That is grace.

In thinking about the nature of this gift is the focus that Matthew puts on the word immediately. Both sets of disciples here were in the middle of fishing. One had just cast their nets, the other was mending their nets. But as soon as Jesus calls, immediately they followed Him.

Why did they immediately respond?

I've typically read this verse as one that is primarily about Lordship and surrender—and that is certainly at play. When God says come, you come. But often that message can leave us feeling guilty, and guilt is a terrible motivator for the mission of God.

When I think of responding immediately to something, I think of it in two ways, either one of danger or one of blessing. When you see blinking blue lights in your rear view mirror, you immediately pull over. When you've won a lottery ticket (though I have no experience with it and do not support gambling), you immediately go cash it in.

Which do you think it is? Do the disciples respond to Jesus command to join His mission out of fear or out of joy?

I'd argue the latter. They do it out of joy. I see this in the way Jesus connects their current line of work with His. He draws an analogy from the lesser to the greater. He compares fishing for fish with fishing for men. Fishing as a worldly pursuit, to fishing as a heavenly pursuit. As one scholar points out, Jesus offers the disciples a promotion, from the secular to the spiritual. from working for earthly father to their Heavenly Father. This job is in the service of the King, God Himself. Similar to David in Ps. 78 was called from shepherding sheep to shepherding the people of Israel. Lesser to the greater.

Fishing for men is about enjoying a gift of God, not erasing your guilt before God. Only Jesus' blood can do that. Evangelism is an invitation to joy and glory.

Did they leave their careers, reputation, family, status, and everything else that made up their lives, yes. But they left it because they saw something so supremely valuable over anything they'd ever experienced. What appears like sacrifice is not sacrifice at all—it's an investment into receiving something far greater.

Two scriptures:

“24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” Matthew 16:24-26

44 “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. -Matthew 13:44

In following Jesus they lost nothing and gained everything. A brief qualifier here... Leaving everything to follow Jesus is first a spiritual reality. Complete reordering of your life's priorities. Everything you do now has a different color. You have a different lens. (raking leaves)

How abandonment and total commitment to Jesus fleshes itself out may look very different in each of our lives. It might mean giving up your job, or it might mean keeping your job, but it certainly means you now have a different boss and you work for different purposes. It might mean you move to another nation, or it might mean you stay right where you are, but it does mean you are no longer your own, and where you live is determined by Jesus.

c. Jesus provides His workers with His power and His presence

The wording is very clear that if we follow He will make us fishers of men. We follow Him by placing our faith in Him, and He is responsible for making us fishers of men. Evangelism is His job. Proclaiming the gospel is His job. That's what He promises to do here in this passage. It's like taking a job that you don't know anything about, and the boss says, don't worry, I'm going to train you. For us that struggle with evangelism, this should give us great confidence and hope... "I will make you a fisher of men"

Consider the great commission, "And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus is sending them out to witness with All Authority (His sovereign power) and His abiding presence (His intimacy)

He ascends to Heaven after His death, and tells the disciples to wait until He sends the Holy Spirit to empower them. To empower them for what... Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Eph. 2:10

To sum up this heading, Jesus ministry strategy is His church. That means no one is on the sidelines, everyone has a role to play, and everyone is empowered to play, not based on your abilities, but based on His ability. It also means that if we are not sacrificing for Jesus' mission, not engaged, there's a break down somewhere. The check engine light is on. We've misinterpreted the call. We've degraded the job description and degraded the boss. We need to repent and see God as gloriously satisfying and working for Him infinitely more valuable than working for any other cause.

The King's Ministry: His Goal

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.

Here we have a summary of Jesus' ministry, and we get a foretaste of what His mission is.

God created the world, and it was good, but man sins and that world and all humanity is destroyed because of it. God's plan from the very beginning was that He would send the 2nd person of the Trinity to restore and redeem everything that was lost in the Fall in the garden of Eden.

His mission is to recreate a new heavens and a new earth where His Word reigns, where righteousness dwells forever, and where suffering has been abolished.

That's why John the Baptist sends word through his disciples, Is he the One? And Jesus replies...

All creation is being restored. Jesus certainly is showing us His authority over the created order, but He's also showing us His love of creation and His desire to fully re-create it. It says He healed every disease, and every affliction... all the sick and afflicted and oppressed by demons and He healed all of them.

The new heavens and new earth will be a place where our spiritual and physical needs are met. It's important to see that Jesus here brings good news to sinners and good news to sufferers together. Suffering is a product of sin, so His and our primary message deals with sin. But we meet sufferers with love to do two things... adorn the doctrine of the gospel, make it look beautiful and attractive, and we also accompany the gospel with love as a proclamation of the kingdom to come.

We also see an emphasis here that the Word of God and love of God is reaching to the multitudes. It has traveled to the nations. God's love is being poured out on all. This too is a picture of Heaven, where every tribe and tongue will worship around the Throne.

So we have here in this last part of the narrative, a summary of Jesus ministry—His demonstration of the kingdom and the kingdom to come.

It's not a perfect picture, however, because there are these crowds, that Matthew evidently intentionally gives this ambiguity to. The crowds are not the disciples. They are kind of on the fence. Some follow Jesus out of conviction. Some follow Him because others are following Him, or because they are waiting for His next act, maybe just so they might get a blessing.

We will see as the book of Matthew unfolds that the crowds have to make a decision. Are you a disciple of Christ, or are you one in the crowd? Have you repented, and are you continuing to repent?

Jesus is the King, and He has come to do work. His ministry gives us a new identity, a new purpose, and a new world. Let us worship Him and live lives that passionately put Him on display, leveraging every opportunity for His mission, that others may know, enjoy, and worship Him forever.