

The Work of King Jesus Begins

Matt 4:12-25

Intro. The opening chapters of Matthew's Gospel systematically present Jesus Christ as the Messiah and king of Israel and the world. He's shown to be the rightful heir to the throne of David / the virgin born Son of God / and the fulfiller of numerous OT prophecies. His birth was announced by angels and supernaturally signaled by a star. Magi from the east worshipped Him but King Herod wanted Him dead. Warned by an angel, the family of Jesus fled to Egypt where they remained until an angel instructed them to return to Nazareth. All these events, from His humble birth to His ignominious hometown demonstrate how thoroughly Jesus became one of us. Because so many who follow Him are ordinary like you and me, let me explain that 25 cent word *ignominious*. (I looked it up) *Ignominious involves a total loss of dignity and self-respect, making somebody or something appear shamefully weak and ineffective.* That was the impact to any who were **Nazarene**. When Philip said they'd found the Messiah and he came from Nazareth. Nathanael said, "**Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?**" (**Jn. 1:46**) Yet at that moment, Nathanael couldn't know how much good would come from this ignominious town and the Messiah who lived there.

About 29 years pass between the end of **chap. 2** and **3:1**. John the Baptizer and Jesus are now 30 years old. News of John's revival ministry was the trigger that brought Jesus from Nazareth to the desert of Judea to be baptized by John. John's reluctance / the obedience of Jesus / the descent of the Spirit / and the commendation of God the Father...all testified to the holy identity of Jesus. But up to this point, the claims about Jesus had not been tested. So immediately after His baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit to the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. As it was for Israel centuries earlier, the wilderness was Messiah's proving ground. Michael Card wrote a song I appreciate so much. The lyrics go like this... "*In the wilderness, in the wilderness...God calls His sons and daughters to the wilderness. He gives grace sufficient to survive every test. And that's the faithful promise of the wilderness.*" Have you been there? Has there been a wilderness chapter in your life?...a defining moment when circumstances forced you to decide *What drives you? / Whose applause matters most to you? / and Who or what deserves your worship?* In the wilderness Jesus proved His unswerving loyalty to His Father. He's the sinless Savior we need and perfect King our hearts long for! **Heb. 4:15** says, **For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.**

Everything Matthew wrote had one purpose...to convince us Jesus is the Messiah...the One chosen to save us from sin and establish God's righteous kingdom on earth. The divine declaration made at Christ's baptism had now been tested and proven. Christ's moral authority had been put to an extreme test. Jesus answered Satan's temptations with the Word of God and Satan was silenced. The Adversary left in utter defeat. John had prepared the way by his message of repentance. Now the stage was set for the beginning of Christ's public ministry...the work His Father had given Him to do. His work was a ministry of grace and goodness that brought great benefit and relief to many people irrespective of their background or status. Looking back, Peter summed up the ministry of Jesus in **Acts 10:34-38** - **Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached--how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.** Keep these verses in mind as we consider the start of Christ's ministry. There are three movements in the passage before us this AM.

1. Rejection – vs. 12-17 - When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali--to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles--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." From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

Nearly a year passed between **Matt. 4:11** and **4:12**. Matthew compressed the early Judean ministry of Jesus into the short statement of **v. 12 - When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee**. A parallel NT is a useful tool that provides a more complete sequence of events. Here are just a few events Matthew passed over.

- After His temptation, Jesus met and called His first disciples. (**Jn. 1**)
- At the wedding in Cana of Galilee He performed His first miracle turning water to wine. (**Jn. 2**)
- **Jn. 2:12, 13** say, **After this He went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days. When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**
- At Jerusalem, Jesus performed a number of miracles and cleansed the Temple.
- Then came His night time encounter with Nicodemus (**Jn. 3**) and the journey through Samaria where He met the woman at the well (**Jn. 4**).
- From Samaria, Jesus went home to Nazareth where He preached in the synagogue. His text was **Isa. 61**. He claimed He was the One God had sent to preach **good news** and to proclaim **the year of the Lord's favor**. At first the people responded with amazement and delight. But when Jesus rebuked their unbelief...they reacted with anger and violence. They drove Jesus out of town. They intended to throw Him over a cliff but He escaped. (**Lk. 4:16-30**). **v.30** says, **...He walked right through the crowd and went on his way.**
- Then, according to Luke and Matthew, Jesus went from Nazareth down to Capernaum on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum became the headquarters for His Galilean ministry. Capernaum was the setting for most of His miracles.

Though a casual reader of Matthew's Gospel wouldn't know this...a year had passed. After John the Baptizer had been preaching and baptizing for perhaps a year and a half, he was arrested by Herod Antipas. John's fate is described in detail in **Matt. 14**. But news of John's arrest reached all the way to Nazareth. So **v.13** says, **Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali...**When Gospel accounts are compared, Jesus left Nazareth for three reasons: *first*, the arrest of John / *second*, rejection by the people of His hometown / and *third* mounting hostility by the religious leaders in Jerusalem. One thing is certain, Jesus wasn't motivated by fear. He feared no one. Following His Father's lead, Jesus left Nazareth to avoid conflict before the appointed time. But these verses highlight hostility and rejection. Animosity to John and to Jesus had surfaced. **Jn. 1:11** says, **He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him**. This was literally fulfilled first at Nazareth. The rejection that happened at His hometown prepares us for the opposition that came later because men's hearts are the same everywhere.

But Matthew has another focus. He wants his readers to see how Scriptures were fulfilled through the hostilities leveled at John and Jesus. **vs.13b -14** say, **Leaving Nazareth, He went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali--to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:** The Messiah's coming to Capernaum had been prophesied 600 years earlier. Let's look together at **Isa. 9**. In this chapter Isaiah spoke of Israel's coming Messiah and Deliverer. Many of us are familiar with **vs. 6, 7 - For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.**

And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

But here Matthew quoted the first two verses of this chapter. **Isa. 9:1, 2 - Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan--The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.** Naphtali and Zebulun were two of Jacob's sons. Along with Asher, these brothers of another mother were given land adjacent to each other in the north of Israel. As you can see on the map, much of Naphtali's eastern border is the Sea of Galilee. **Isa. 9:2** explains that God humbled the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. They were subjected to **gloom** and **distress** because of disobedience. Divine discipline came in 732 BC when the Northern Kingdom was overrun and made a province of the Assyrian Empire. Under Gentile control, the region was given the name, **Galilee of the Gentiles**.

But notice **v. 2 - in the future He will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan**—600 years before Jesus came, God promised to honor this region. In the context of **Isa. 9**, this time of blessing was associated with the arrival of Israel's Messiah. So here in **Matt. 4**, Matthew was given to understand that Jesus is the Messiah who fulfilled this ancient prophecy. He quoted these verses in **vs. 15, 16. "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles--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."**

Galilee was rural, blue collar and not known for culture or academia. The region has many small towns that were densely populated. Galileans were fishermen / farmers / and tradesmen. They had rough hands and unpolished manners. Since Assyrians were sent in to settle among the Jews who remained after the invasion, the population was mixed and many were half-breeds. The idea that Israel's Messiah would begin His ministry in this region was unthinkable to the refined Jewish population of Judea. Alfred Edersheim wrote, *"There was a general contempt in Rabbinic circles for all that was Galilean."* Regarding the Law, Galileans were morally loose and impure. They were as far from Jerusalem politically and spiritually as they were geographically. Even their dialect was detestable to the more cultured Jews of Judea. Yet Galilee was the focal point for most of Christ's ministry! In God's sight, Galilee was populous and very needy. Unlike the Judeans, the Galileans were not entrenched in self-righteousness and religion. Situated on a major highway called the Via Maris or **Way of the Sea**, the Galileans were more open to new ideas than the Judeans were.

Isaiah characterized the population of Zebulun and Naphtali as **people living in darkness**. Throughout the Bible, darkness is associated with moral, spiritual and intellectual ignorance. That was Galilee. While the Judeans were caught up with ceremonial Judaism and law-keeping, the Galileans were lost and many of them knew it. Like the Judeans, self-righteous people are the most resistant to the Gospel. They feel enlightened and content in their religion. The people of Galilee lived in moral and spiritual ignorance and they knew it. They groped around for answers and hope. When Jesus came, they were drawn to Him the way moths are drawn to a porch light. The prophecy of **Isa. 65:1** came to pass. **"I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.'**" Like rays of the sun stretching across a dark landscape, **v.16** says the light of Christ's righteousness and truth dispelled the shadows of death and dawned on the people of Galilee. The impact Christ made in Judea was nothing like this.

v.17 says Jesus preached the same message as John the Baptizer. **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”** He called people to confront the sin that separated them from God and turn to Him. As we said previously, the kingdom of heaven can only be entered on God’s terms. We must change our minds concerning sin, righteousness and judgment. To embrace Christ as King, we must first know Him as Savior. Like the guests invited to the wedding feast, we need Christ to clothe us with His righteousness before we can participate in the blessings and joy of His kingdom.

2. Recruitment – vs. 18-22 - 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. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him. 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. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

From the earliest days of His ministry, Jesus called a band of men to follow Him. Those who obeyed His command became His disciples...His followers. I’ve labeled this point *recruitment* because that’s what Jesus was doing here. He was recruiting men to join Him in the work of kingdom proclamation. It’s interesting that Jesus called two pairs of brothers...first, **Simon** (or Peter) and **Andrew**. He then called **James** and **John**, the sons of Zebedee. The trio of Peter, James and John became His inner circle...His closest co-workers and friends. As we see in v.19, **Peter** and **Andrew** were casting a net from shore when Jesus called them. **James** and **John** were on board their father’s boat mending nets. All four were Galilean fishermen...commoners...ordinary working men like so many of us. Bible commentators have long compared the two phases of work done by these fishermen to the dual ministries of the church. Peter and Andrew were like evangelists and missionaries who cast their nets to win souls. But James and John were like pastors, teachers and disciple-makers whose work is to mend lives torn and broken by sin. Catching and mending...that’s the work we’re called to.

All four men recognized the authority of Jesus. Matthew records here the second occasion when these men followed Jesus. (The first is recorded in **Jn.1**) But when Jesus called this second time, they immediately dropped what they were doing and followed Him. **“Come, follow Me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”** What does it mean to be a disciple?...it means to be a learner. As we’ve said so often, Christianity isn’t a religion, it’s a relationship. It’s a life of submission to God’s will and Christ’s leadership. It’s a life of following Jesus and learning to be like Him along the way. Yet discipleship is costly. Like an Olympic athlete, it demands that we forsake our own interests and what others are doing to pursue the interests of Christ. The sad fact is that many who call themselves Christians are not followers...not disciples or disciple-makers. In the last years of my ministry...however many that may be...I’m determined by God’s grace to emphasize this distinction to a greater degree. My prayer is that God will move more believers of MBC from sideliners to active disciple-makers in obedience to Christ’s call.

Like clay in the potter’s hand, Jesus said, **I will make you fishers of men.** In other words, Jesus committed Himself to remake these men...to make them something they were not at that moment. He said, “You guys are fishers of fish but I will make you fishers of men. I’ll turn your affections from cold, scaly, soul-less fish, to self-sacrificing love for God’s highest creation...people. I’ll teach you how to catch them and mend their lives.”

These verses say, **at once**, and **immediately** these men left their nets / their boats / and their father to follow Jesus. They didn’t delay or offer excuses like some others who were called. Mark this down...discipleship calls for a radical obedience.

It calls for a decisive response where we say, "yes" to Jesus Christ. An opposite response is found in **Matt. 8:21, 22 - Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."** The four words that betray this man's attitude are **Lord, first let me**. It's a total contradiction to call Jesus **Lord** and in the same breath say **first let me**. Jesus addressed this contradiction in **Matt. 10:37, 38 - "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."**

When James Calvert went out as a missionary to the cannibals of the Fiji Islands, the ship captain tried to turn him back, saying, "*You will lose your life and the lives of those with you if you go among such savages.*" To that, Calvert replied, "*We died before we came here.*" Still today Jesus speaks through His Word. He says to all who believe...**Follow Me**. How have you responded? How would you answer if asked, "*In what ways are you His follower?*"

Now let's think about this theologically for a moment. The **12 tribes of Israel** were called to be a royal nation and a kingdom of priests. They were called by God to be a light to the Gentile nations of the world who live in darkness. Their influence was to be positive and a blessing to those around them. But Israel failed miserably. They didn't obey the Lord or fulfill their commission. Then Jesus came. His plan set aside the 12 tribes for the time being. He replaced them with 12 men. Unlike the 12 tribes, these men listened to His voice and were obedient to the heavenly calling. At this point in redemptive history, the whole kingdom program rested on the shoulders of these men. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were four of the 12 Jesus selected to become His ambassadors to the nations. We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the faith of these ordinary men from Galilee! **Eph. 2:19, 20 - Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.** The Church isn't built on these men themselves...we're built on the testimony and doctrinal foundation Christ laid by means of these men.

How important were these first followers of Jesus? Let me read **Rev. 21:12 -14** which describes the eternal city, the New Jerusalem. **It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.** The symbolism shows both redeemed Israel and the Church residing in this city. The names of the 12 tribes are engraved on the 12 gates that lead into the city. But notice, the names of the 12 apostles are engraved on 12 foundations. Like a gate, Israel's role under the Law was to lead us to Christ. But the apostle's role under grace was to teach us to be rooted and grounded in Him.

Later Jesus told Peter, **I will build My church...**but Christ never intended to do the work alone. **Eph. 4:11, 12** outline His plan for disciple-making. **It was He (Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...** While certain believers are called and equipped for special ministries, all of God's people are called to be involved in kingdom work. Every believer is to be a disciple who makes other disciples. We see that in the Great Commission of **Matt. 28:19, 20**.

3. Relief – vs. 23-25 - Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various

diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

I struggled to find a word that begins with the letter “r” for this final point. The two finalists were refreshment and relief. The Roloids TV commercial tipped the scales in favor of relief. Do you remember those commercials? A guy with heartburn takes a Roloids and says, “*How do you spell relief?*” Relief is actually a good word to describe the ministry of Jesus in Galilee. Here’s why...like the effect of a Roloids tablet, miseries were relieved by Christ’s miracles, but not entirely eliminated. Note that I didn’t use the words redemption or regeneration...just relief.

In **Jn. 4:34** said, “**My food...is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.**” From the day at the Temple when He was just 12 years old, Jesus was determined to be about His Father’s business. Now in **Matt. 4:23, 24** the Father’s business shows up in His life work. According to **v. 23** this work was **preaching the good news and healing every disease and sickness.** Hey Nathanael ...feast your eyes on all the good that has come out of Nazareth already!...Light for people living in darkness and the shadow of death / Good news for people in despair / Healing and relief for people **ill with various diseases/ those suffering severe pain / the demon-possessed / those having seizures, and the paralyzed.** By His spoken word the healings of Jesus were instantaneous, complete. No one was too sick or too far gone. Jesus healed everybody who came to Him regardless of their faith or lack thereof. And these healings required no therapy / no prescriptions / no follow up visits / and no bill! How do you spell relief? Don’t miss this...the Father’s business is to do us good!

Let me briefly say a word about each point as we finish. The passage this AM begins on a note of rejection ...the rejection of John and Jesus. In **Jn. 15:18** Jesus said, “**If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.**” To follow Jesus in a world going the other way is to invite ridicule and censure. I was so proud of Ken Ham in his debate with Bill Nye last week. He refused to water down Gospel truth even though he knows it’s foolishness to the unbelieving scientific community. Ken Hamm is a disciple and a disciple-maker. He demonstrated loyalty to His master just as Jesus did when tempted in the wilderness. We need His courage!

Then comes the matter of **recruitment** and the call of Jesus. His call is clear and simple. To every believer Jesus says, “**Follow Me.**” I know exactly what His call meant and continues to mean in my life. It’s a decision to be made every day. But what does His call mean to you? Are you answering His call? Are doing your part to build up His church and kingdom by making other disciples?

Finally, it’s hard to estimate the **relief** Jesus brought to so many people. **v. 25** says, **Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed Him.** This all sounds so good. We like numbers, crowds and enthusiasm. The work of Jesus seemed to be off to a fantastic start. But the crowd soon thinned out. The enthusiasm escaped like air from an untied balloon. It soon was apparent the people were drawn by the miracles not the message. John had already been arrested and before long the crowd would turn on Jesus too. We want relief without repentance. Nothing has changed in 2,000 years!

In these closing verses of **chap. 4** we have the first glimpse of the powers of the kingdom. The King has come and Jesus demonstrated what life in His kingdom will be like. Sickness, accidental injury and death will be a thing of the past. In **Jn. 10:10** Jesus said, **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.** After Jesus was rejected and crucified Peter said, **You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached--how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under**

the power of the devil, because God was with him. (Acts 10:37, 38) Israel's rejection of Jesus would be hard to fathom if we weren't truthful about our own hearts. The greatest loss in history is the kingdom they forfeited because they refused to believe God and embrace Heaven's King, Yet by rejecting and crucifying Jesus, God demonstrated the greatness of His love and grace and accomplished the greatest work of all time. Before a righteous kingdom could ever be established on earth, Jesus had to do the work necessary to make us righteous. That's what Jesus accomplished on the cross. **II Cor. 5:21 - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** He asks you to believe it and trust Him.