

The True Light of the Kingdom Has Dawned

Matthew 4:12-25

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How do you talk about yourself when people ask about your life or family, or work? I don't always emphasize the same events in my life when I tell my story. Here is what I mean, a person is usually asking for a specific reason. He or she wants to know some specific information. So, I share my life's story trying to answer the question being asked.

This is kind of what we find in the four gospel accounts. Each writer tells the story of Jesus' life and ministry from his perspective. The Holy Spirit has led each writer to write with a slightly different purpose. They all want to communicate accurately who Jesus truly is, but they are thinking of different audiences. They can't say everything about Jesus, so the Holy Spirit has them tell certain things in order to say what God wants said.

For example, not all of Matthew's Gospel is in chronological order. He did not intend it to be. Neither is all that Jesus did in His life included in Matthew's Gospel. As John said in His gospel in chapters 20:30-31 and 21:35

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name . . . And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which, if every one of them were written down, I suppose not even the world itself could contain the books that would be written.

So, John tells us that he couldn't say everything, but he told us what he intended to tell us. Did you catch the purpose of John's Gospel in v. 31? John's purpose in writing was *that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him, you may have eternal life*. Likewise, Matthew wrote for a specific purpose, but he never stated his purpose as plainly as John. Yet, by studying His Gospel, you can learn His purpose.

We are going to wrap up the introduction to Matthew's Gospel. As we do, Matthew's purpose for writing becomes clear. So, let's recap where we've been so we can bring that purpose into clearer focus. In Matthew 1, we learned that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, who is the Son of Abraham and the Son of David. In Matthew 2, we learned that Jesus is the promised sovereign King. In Matthew 3, we learned that Jesus is the True Son of God. Finally, last Sunday, in Matthew 4:1-11, we saw one more time that Jesus is the True Son of God. Now, taking all of this together along with Matthew 4:12-25 we can state the purpose of Matthew's Gospel like this: *Jesus is the True Son of God, the promised Messiah, the True King, who ushers in His Kingdom through teaching, preaching, and setting the captive free through His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead and then commissions His church to fulfill His disciple-making mission.*

Matthew 4:12-25 wraps up the introduction of his gospel. In vv. 12-25, we have three scenes that are not in chronological order but are placed here to make sure we understand who Jesus is and prepare us for His Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7. Here are my three points: *The Message of the King—Repent! The Call of the King—Follow Me! and The Mission of the King—Set the Captives Free.*

I. The Message of the King—Repent! (vv. 12-17)

From the wilderness temptations, Jesus moves into ministry. Matthew helps us understand that transition. In v. 12, we learn that Jesus withdrew to the region of Galilee after John the Baptist was arrested. John's arrest meant that the Forerunner of the Messiah's ministry was concluding, and now the Messiah's ministry was beginning. John must decrease, and Jesus must increase.

Jesus did not begin His ministry by moving in the circles of power. Instead of going to Jerusalem, He moves into the rural region of Galilee. It is a backwater region with a bunch of rural people with hick accents. The Jews looked down on people from this region, but for the King, it was an important place.

Jesus, by moving His ministry to Galilee, fulfilled Isaiah 9:1-2, which we read in vv. 15-16, *Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, along the road by the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.*¹⁶ *The people who live in darkness have seen a great light, and for those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.*

Jesus inaugurated His ministry in a region of Palestine that is inhabited not only by Jews but by a large Gentile population. By beginning His ministry here, He not only fulfills prophecy, but He continues to water the seeds of the Great Commission that were planted in chapters one and two. Jesus inaugurated His ministry in *Galilee of the Gentiles*, people who were living in physical and spiritual darkness. These people were poor, oppressed, overlooked, and ignored by the rest of Israel.

What is the message that Jesus proclaimed? Look at v. 17:

From then on, Jesus began to preach, "Repent because the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Jesus began His ministry with the same message John the Baptist preached—repentance. Jesus was short and to the point. John the Baptist paved the way for His message. Now, Jesus can usher in the fullness of the message of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus' message of repentance comes not only with water baptism but also with the baptism of the Spirit.

Jesus is a compassionate Savior, but He does not mince words with it comes to His message. He called them to turn from their Christ-less darkness in which they lived and turn to Him. He was the Messiah, and He had come as the Great Light in their dark world, and if they wanted out of the darkness, they must repent of their sin.

Friends, the message is the same for us today. If you are ignoring Jesus and living life without Him, then you are living in Christ-less darkness, and He calls you to repent and come to Him for Light and Life.

Let's think about what it means to *live in darkness*. Some people hate the darkness in which they live, and some people love it.

People who hate the darkness long to be free, but something seems to keep them captive. They can't seem to get their lives on track. They want freedom and joy and happiness, but they do not know

where to turn. They try and fail and try and fail and try and fail, but they just can't seem to find joy, peace, purpose, and freedom. This may be you, and the good news is that Jesus came to set you free.

People who live in darkness but hate it are really asking the darkness to give them life. Think about it this way. *What are you asking of something when you place your hope in it? You're asking it to give you peace in your heart. You're asking it to give you meaning in life. You're asking it to give you purpose and direction. You're asking it to give you a reason to continue. You're asking it to get you through your difficulty and disappointment. You're asking it to free you from your anxiety or envy. You're asking it to give you joy in the morning and peace at night. That is a lot to ask of anything or anyone. Friends, if your hope disappoints you, then you are groping in the darkness, and you need the Great Light of Christ.*¹ The message for you is to repent and turn to Jesus for light and life.

On the other hand, there are some who love the darkness. They may not realize it, but they have placed their hope in that darkness. And they live their lives trying to convince themselves that the darkness they are living in will satisfy and deliver them, but it will not.

Sin makes us citizens of the kingdom of darkness. Sin causes all of us to be committed to low-light living. We hide, we deny, we cover up, we lie, we excuse, we shift the blame, we rationalize our sin, we defend ourselves, and eventually, we try to justify ourselves. These are all desperate acts of people who are desperate to live in the darkness and fear living in the light. They fear being exposed.

Friends, the Great Light of the grace of Jesus has come to set the captives free. Jesus' grace shatters the darkness. It explodes on us with power that breaks the chain around our hard hearts. Grace exposes the sin we want to keep in the darkness but not to shame us. Instead, the Great Light of the grace of Jesus comes to forgive and set you free.²

Jesus' message to those who are in darkness is—repent and turn to Him for light and hope. Jesus is still setting the captives free. His words are just as powerful today as they were two thousand years ago. You do not have to live in darkness any longer, if you will but come to Jesus.

II. The Call of the King—Follow Me! (vv. 18-22)

From the message of the King, we hear the call of the King. The *message* and the *call* go together. As a matter of fact, you cannot have one without the other. In vv. 18-22, we read about Jesus calling His first four disciples. Let's read it again:

As he was walking along the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter), and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ "Follow me," he told them, "and I will make you fish for people." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father, preparing their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

When we read Matthew's account of the calling of these first four Gospels, it seems the calling was abrupt. It sounds like Jesus had never met these four men. However, when we study Mark, Luke,

¹ Paul Tripp, *New Morning Mercies*, January 23.

² *Ibid*, February 14.

and John's Gospel, we learn that Jesus had known these four for some time. They knew Jesus was a teacher. They had heard Him teach.

Luke 5 records the details of Jesus' calling of the first four in greater detail. When Jesus finished teaching from Peter and Andrew's boat, He told them to put their boats out in deeper water. Peter protested by saying they had fished all night and caught nothing, but at Your word, we will do so. They caught so many fish that their boats were about to sink. At this point, Peter realized that Jesus was more than just a teacher, and he got on his knees before Jesus and cried out:

"Go away from me, because I'm a sinful man, Lord!"

Listen to their call in Luke 5:9-11,

For he and all those with him were amazed at the catch of fish they had taken,¹⁰ and so were James and John, Zebedee's sons, who were Simon's partners. "Don't be afraid," Jesus told Simon. "From now on you will be catching people."¹¹ Then they brought the boats to land, left everything, and followed him.

Luke's account of Peter, Andrew, James, and John's call to follow Jesus may sound less abrupt, but it was no less costly. These men were tradesmen with businesses and families.

They are often portrayed as poor fishermen, but they were actually sort of middle-class men who had employees, equipment, tools, and boats and most likely had to do some accounting to run their fishing business. Their business had to be somewhat successful because it had to support their families and those who worked for them. So, this was not a fly-by-night business they ran.

For them, to answer the call to follow Jesus as His disciple was costly. They walked away from their livelihoods to begin a new career as disciples and eventually apostles. Their past business experience was not wasted because Jesus was going to teach them how to maximize their fishing knowledge. They would become fishers of men.

Two words changed their lives—*Follow Me*. Charles Spurgeon wrote that Jesus' call of these early disciples was like the call of every other disciple,

The call was effectual. No nets entangle those whom Jesus calls to follow Him. They come straightway. They come at all costs. They come without question. They come to quit old haunts. They come to follow their Leader without stipulation or reservation.³

These two words are so very, very important because they teach us what it means to become a Christian and what it means to be a disciple today. For some of us, it teaches us what it means to leave what is familiar and follow Jesus into full-time vocational ministry.

Here are five truths that help us count the cost and answer the call of Christ upon our lives.

The first truth is *repentance*. This is the message of the King. We are called to repent of our sin and turn to Christ. We turn from living life in the direction we want to live and turn and face Jesus and begin to follow Him.

³ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Commentary on Matthew*, 42.

This leads us to the second truth of answering the call—*obedience*. True repentance naturally leads to obedience. Now, I am not talking about *blind obedience* or *mindless adherence*. Even the disciples had heard Jesus teach and knew what He was calling them to do. They had to count the cost of obedience to Jesus. Bottom line: Without obedience, there is no genuine repentance and, therefore, no genuine Christianity.

You cannot follow Jesus unless you understand they must become obedient to Him. What this means is that when we come to Jesus for salvation, we come to Him as Lord and Savior, not just as Savior.

Back in the '70s, '80s, and even into the early '90s, there was a dangerous doctrine going around that taught that you could come to Jesus as your Savior, and then at some point in the future, you could make Him Lord of your life and then become obedient to Jesus.

This doctrine is not true Christianity. This is false teaching. When you come to Jesus, you come to Him as your Savior and Lord. True salvation results in transformation through obedience to Jesus.

The third aspect of answering the call is submission. We saw this when Peter bowed before Jesus and told Him that he was a sinful man. Bottom line: following Jesus involves submission to Him. Jesus describes submission as putting on His yoke. Jesus is going to tell us in Matthew 11:28-30,

“Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take up my yoke and learn from me because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

The word *submission* comes from a Latin word that means *to place yourself under*. True disciples put themselves under the authority of the King.

The fourth aspect of answering the call is—*trust*. It is impossible to follow Jesus without trusting Him. We talk about faith and repentance as being the proper responses to the gospel or the work of Jesus on the cross for us. We must trust Him or, in other words, place our faith in Jesus as the One who died on the cross for our sins and rose victoriously from the dead.

Finally, answering the call implies *perseverance*. To truly follow Jesus does not mean we follow Him one day and then not the next. It is a lifetime commitment, and it is not fulfilled until we have run our course in life and completed it. In other words, we must finish the race that Jesus lays out before us. A true disciple who has answered the call is one who follows Jesus to the very end of His life.

Jordan Prescott and I were talking about baseball this week, and we were talking about how the Tampa Bay Rays were unbeaten after 13 games. It is a pretty amazing feat in modern baseball. It has not been done since 1900. However, in baseball, it does not matter how you start; it matters how you finish.

Brothers and sisters, the Christian life is the same way. None of us start out as mature disciples. Many of us answer the call of Jesus, and then many of us have a rough start. We experience a few successes but lots of failures. We have lots to learn, and therefore we must persevere in order to grow in our discipleship. Bottom line: It does not matter how you start but how you finish.

There may be some of you here this morning, and what you are hearing is the call to follow Christ. You understand you need Jesus and want to follow Him. You hear the Holy Spirit calling you to confess that you are a sinner. You have been living life on your own terms and doing what you want to do, and ignoring God. Now you see your sin and realize you need Jesus. Let me encourage you to follow

Jesus as His disciple. I would love to talk with you after the service or talk to another Christian here at Grand to find out what it means to become a Christian.

Also, there may be someone here this morning which is hearing another kind of call. There may be a person or two here who is sensing a call into vocational ministry or even missions.

Perhaps you've been a disciple for some time now, and you have been wrestling with Him calling you to leave your profession and go into full-time vocational ministry. This is a real call. There is the call to faith in Jesus, and there is also the call to ministry.

If you are wondering if Jesus is calling you to vocational ministry, then I want to talk to you too. Find Pastor Eric or me and set up a time to get coffee so we can help you discern what Jesus is calling you to do.

III. The Mission of the King—Set Captives Free! (vv. 23-25)

In this last scene, we see Jesus doing three things: *teaching, preaching, and healing the sick and afflicted*. This is the ministry of leading people out of darkness and setting the captives free.

Jesus' ministry was balanced. He taught and preached, and He also healed many various diseases and even cast out demons. Listen to vv. 23-25 again:

Now Jesus began to go all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. ²⁴Then the news about him spread throughout Syria. So they brought to him all those who were afflicted, those suffering from various diseases and intense pains, the demon-possessed, the epileptics, and the paralytics. And he healed them. ²⁵Large crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

Teaching and preaching were Jesus' primary mission. By healing the sick, paralyzed, blind, and demon-possessed, He showed that the Great Light of God had dawned and the Messianic Age had come in Him. The healings validated His ministry. It showed that the Kingdom of Light was driving out the darkness. The power of the curse of sin would soon be broken.

Friends, as the church, we still carry out the three ministries of Jesus. We are to be a *disciple-making church* by teaching and preaching the good news that salvation has come in Jesus Christ. We do that every Sunday, on Wednesdays, and in all of our Bible studies. However, the heart of disciple-making is in one-on-one relationships where disciples get together with a believer or an unbeliever and read the Bible, pray, and share the transforming power of the gospel.

You see, not everyone is called to stand in front of a group and lead a Bible study or facilitate a small group, but every disciple is called to make disciples. Moms and dads disciple their families. Older disciples disciple younger believers. Sometimes a disciple helps an unbeliever understand the gospel, and this is disciple-making too. This is the basics of being a disciple-making church.

But how do we carry out Jesus' healing ministry? Although we are not a physical hospital, we pray for physical healing. We lift up to Jesus, those who are sick and hurting, to the One who gives all healing. We ask the King to heal them and free them of their illness or disease.

James 5:14 tells us that when we are sick, to call the elders for prayer. We ask our elders to anoint with oil those who are sick. We believe that, and we practice that.

We also want to be a church that shows the love of Jesus by meeting the needs of the poor and needy and in bondage to sin. In the early church, the Apostles charged the local churches to care for the poor and needy.

We also want to do that as a church. We are a small church, so we can't do everything, but we can do some things.

So, think of a call to ministry this way. You don't have to drop everything and make a radical departure from where you live to do ministry with those who are poor, needy, and in bondage to sin. We need people right here in our church to help lead ministries right now.

We currently need someone to be a point person for Care Portal. This person will help communicate material needs (diapers, cribs, etc. . .) to our church body through Care Portal. *Obria*, or *Martha's House of Hope*, work with people who have unplanned pregnancies. Then they connect with the Care Portal point person in local churches. The Care Portal Point Person sends out messages to the church through the Care Portal. This mobilizes the body to assist those families. If you have questions, you can talk to Tamra Call or Tim Lubinus for more info on that ministry.

Another ministry we need help with is our Housing Ministry. We have a Housing Ministry at Grand, and we currently need an Advocate for it. This person will work with a family who lives in one of our houses by praying for them, discipling them, and helping them connect to the church. There is more to this ministry than I can list right here, but it is a vital ministry for our church. If you need more info on that ministry, talk to our Housing Ministry elder: Tim Young.

Bottom line: Jesus cared about the whole person. He was concerned about their spiritual need most of all, but He did not neglect their physical needs. He charged His church to do the same.

Jesus has given us the message and the mission to call people out of darkness and into His marvelous light. May the Lord bless our efforts to carry out His mission.