

Matthew 4:12-23

Following Jesus

Sermon

Hobart, February 5th, 2017

Launceston, February 12th, 2017

Matthew 4:12-23

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beside the sea, beyond the Jordan River,
in Galilee where so many Gentiles live,

¹⁶ the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light.

And for those who lived in the land where death casts its shadow,
a light has shined.”*

¹⁷ From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*”

¹⁸ One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. ¹⁹ Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” ²⁰ And they left their nets at once and followed him.

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²³ Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. ²⁴ News about him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed—he healed them all. ²⁵ Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns,* Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River. ¹

* **4:15–16** Isa 9:1–2 (Greek version).

* **4:17** Or *has come*, or *is coming soon*.

* **4:25** Greek *Decapolis*.

¹ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Mt 4:12–25). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

I. THIS YEAR THE REVISED COMMON LECTIONERY IS FOCUSED ON THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

A. IN THE FIRST CHAPTER OF MATTHEW

1. He shows who Jesus is by way of his genealogy
 - a) It shows who Jesus is in the context of Israel and the history and promises of the Old Testament
 - b) He is a legitimate descendant of Abraham and David, a true Israelite
 - c) But controversially his genealogy includes five women, all who were associated with sexual impropriety
 - d) Some of whom were also Gentiles
2. Jesus has become part of our flawed world
 - a) Like his ancestors, he is misjudged, condemned and pushed aside
 - b) He has come to identify with and to redeem all people, of all backgrounds and with all types of problems in their lives

B. MATTHEW CH. 2

1. A few weeks ago, we read Matthew's account of Jesus being taken as a refugee into Egypt
2. And learned how the Son of God lived as one of us, experiencing our lives in all their dimensions
 - a) Particularly our suffering
3. We saw how he is our Exodus from our Egypts--our suffering, our sin and death--through his life, death and resurrection
4. He has come to fulfil all that was promised to Israel
 - a) To be our Messiah, King and Saviour

- b) The one who brings us into the new covenant that is in his very being, his life, his body

C. MATTHEW CH. 3

1. In chapter 3, Matthew goes on to tell us about Jesus' Baptism
2. He recounts how John the Baptist witnessed to who Jesus was
3. And then, how in his Baptism, the Father witnesses that "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."²

D. CH. 4:1-11 THE TEMPTATION

1. Matthew tells us how Jesus resisted the devil's temptations to be a worldly Messiah,
 - a) To use his position, his sonship, his authority for himself
 - b) To take the easy way to power and rulership
 - c) It includes misusing Scripture to justify our own ways, beliefs and priorities
 - d) And putting other values and desires before God

E. THIS BRINGS US TO OUR PASSAGE (MATTHEW 4:12-23)

1. Which is about the calling of the disciples
2. And forms the introduction to Jesus' ministry, his teachings and deeds found in the following chapters,
 - a) including the sermon on the Mount and then by accounts of many of his miracles and healings,
 - b) all of which bear witness to who Jesus was, and the work of the Kingdom of God on earth that we are called to be part of

F. PRAYER

² Matthew 3:17

BODY:

II. MATTHEW 4:12-17 JESUS MINISTRY BEGINS

A. MATTHEW 4:12-17

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he left Judea and returned to Galilee. ¹³ He went first to Nazareth, then left there and moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

1. William Carter in his book *Matthew and the Margins*, writes about the significance of Jesus moving to Galilee:

Jesus left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, a small agricultural and fishing village (population around one thousand) on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. He does not move to the larger cities, Tiberias (built to honor and named after the emperor Tiberias) or Sepphoris, the centers of imperial political, economic, social, and cultural power in Galilee, which maintain the elite's interests and control over the surrounding villages through taxation. As a Jew in Roman-controlled territory, Jesus locates himself among the marginal, with the poor not the wealthy, with the rural peasants not the urban elite, with the ruled not the rulers, with the powerless and exploited not the powerful, with those who resist imperial demands not enforce them. He continues the gospel's preference for the apparently small and insignificant places and people who, nevertheless, are central for God's purposes (2:5-6, 22-23; 3:1).³

2. Richard Jensen adds to this;

"This is all rather astonishing. Shouldn't the Messiah begin and end his work in Jerusalem? Why Capernaum? Why the land of the Gentiles?"

Note that "Gentiles" in v. 15 is a translation of the Greek *ethnos*, which is also part of the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations (*ethnos*)! *Ethnos* basically means the largest grouping of people = "nations." It also takes on a meaning of "those who not 'us'". When "us" are Jews, *ethnos* refers to "Gentiles". When "us" are believers, *ethnos* refers to pagans or non-believers (see 1 Cor 5:1; 10:20; 12:2). We, like him, are to be light to the Gentiles = nations = pagans = those who are not us.⁴

³ Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, A&C Black, 15 Feb. 2005, p. 113. 114

⁴ Richard A. Jensen, *Preaching Matthew's Gospel*, CSS Publishing Company, 1998, p.68

¹⁴ This fulfilled what God said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵ “In the land of Zebulun and of Naphtali,
beside the sea, beyond the Jordan River,
in Galilee where so many Gentiles live,

¹⁶ the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light.

And for those who lived in the land where death casts its shadow,
a light has shined.”*

¹⁷ From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”*

B. WHERE DOES JESUS BEGIN HIS MINISTRY?

1. Galilee

2. Matthew is writing his gospel many years after Jesus (probably in the 80’s or 90’s A.D.), and is reminding his audience how Jesus’ mission was never intended just for Israel

a) He has already shown Jesus’ connection with Gentiles in his genealogy

b) Matthew includes the quotation from Isaiah 8:23-9:1 to connect Jesus to the Messianic prophecies of old

c) And to highlight the broadness and purpose of his Messiahship, mission and ministry

3. Jesus has come to bring light to all who sit in darkness and live in the fear of death

a) He starts in what was seen as an uncultured, “unclean” and undesirable region and people

* **4:15–16** Isa 9:1–2 (Greek version).

* **4:17** Or *has come*, or *is coming soon*.

4. Matthew's readers would be familiar with this text and how it continues in Isaiah 9

C. IF WE READ FURTHER IN ISAIAH 9 WE SEE THIS:

²* The people who walk in darkness

will see a great light.

For those who live in a land of deep darkness,*

a light will shine.

³You will enlarge the nation of Israel,

and its people will rejoice.

They will rejoice before you

as people rejoice at the harvest

and like warriors dividing the plunder.

⁴For you will break the yoke of their slavery

and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders.

You will break the oppressor's rod,

just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian.

⁵The boots of the warrior

and the uniforms bloodstained by war

will all be burned.

They will be fuel for the fire.

⁶For a child is born to us,

a son is given to us.

The government will rest on his shoulders.

And he will be called:

Wonderful Counselor,* Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

* **9:2a** Verses 9:2–21 are numbered 9:1–20 in Hebrew text.

* **9:2b** Greek version reads *a land where death casts its shadow*. Compare Matt 4:16.

* **9:6** Or *Wonderful, Counselor*.

⁷ His government and its peace

will never end.

He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity.

The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will make this happen! ⁵

D. THIS IS THE OPPOSITE OF THE WAY OF THE TEMPTATIONS

1. It gives us an insight into the whole purpose and will of God
2. It describes the way of God, of Jesus, of the Kingdom
 - a) It's direction, its purpose, its outcome

E. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHARACTERISTICS ISAIAH HIGHLIGHTS HERE?

⁴ For you will break the yoke of their slavery

and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders.

You will break the oppressor's rod,

1. v.2 people in darkness being given light
2. v. 4 freedom from slavery, lifting of burdens
 - a) oppression and oppressors being defeated
3. v. 5 getting rid of the vestiges of past oppression (boots, uniforms)
4. v.7 peace
 - a) Leading and ruling with fairness and justice

F. HOW WILL THIS BE ACCOMPLISHED?

1. V.2 Through people seeing the great light of God in Jesus

⁵ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Is 9:2–7). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

- 2.V.3 Through Israel, God's people, his Kingdom being enlarged to include all peoples
- 3.v6 through the child, the son
 - a)The "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace"
 - b)The descendant of David (v.7)
- 4.Through the passionate commitment of God and all his armies
- 5.These are the clear priorities and values of God and Jesus
 - a)Not the self-absorbed, narrow religiosity and insistence on being "right" and in control of what everyone believes that we see with the Pharisees and too many religious people today

G. MATTHEW 4:17

<p>¹⁷ From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*"</p>

- 1.This is the mission and message of Jesus for us, and all people, "repent and turn to God"
 - a)The Kingdom of God, his reign is right there amongst them in the form of Jesus himself
 - b)He has come to bring light into the darkness, and freedom to the lost and sinful, to all of us
- 2.For us and the world around us, the key to the peace and healing that Jesus brings is turning from the darkness, from the way of slavery and heavy burdens, back to God
 - a)It entails a change of allegiance
 - b)A turning from the temptations of living self-righteously, for ourselves and those who we identify with
 - (1) A change from religiosity, worrying about being right, fearing that we are doing the wrong thing religiously

* 4:17 Or *has come*, or *is coming soon*.

- (2) To focusing on what Jesus says really matters
 - c) Putting our trust in Jesus to be our Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God and Prince of Peace
 - d) Following him in reaching out to help those who are suffering and lost in our dark world
- (1) This is what all Christians should be united in rather than dividing over other issues that are right in our own eyes

3. Andrew Prior talks about this repentance, this change of allegiance

He is announcing a fundamentally different way of being human based in justice, righteousness and peace, rather than the normal dog eat dog oppression and exploitation of the weak by the strong. This oppression is based ultimately in a life and culture which is *unrighteous*; that is, not based on the ways of God.

We have just read of Jesus temptation by the devil. He has been tempted to use his power—his life—in *unrighteous* ways, which are essentially summed up in the third temptation: "...if you will fall down and worship me..." Matthew 4:9

Our culture may not consciously bow down and worship the devil, but in essence this is what we do when we do not base our being human in God.

... If we do not follow the way of God, then we do follow the way of the devil. [Bob Dylan](#) was right: *It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody.*

Jesus turns away from Satan. He locates his home in a new place, a sign, Matthew says, that Isaiah 9 is being fulfilled. And he proclaims the new kingdom, the new way of being human, for *from that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.*

The implications of this repentance, this turning to a new way of being, are immediately made clear. He calls *fishermen* to be his disciples.⁶

4. Brian Stoffregen talks more about *repentance*

Repentance properly understood is an "I can't" experience rather than an "I can" experience.

⁶ Andrew Prior, You gotta serve somebody..., January 26 - Epiphany 3, Gospel: Mathew 4:12-23, <https://onemansweb.org/theology/life-on-the-beach-matthew-24-36-44/you-gotta-serve-somebody.html>

If repentance is promising God, "I can do better," then we are trying to keep ourselves in control of our lives. If we **can** do better, we don't need a gracious God, only a patient One who will wait long enough for us to do better. When we come before God confessing, "I can't do better," then we are dying to self. We are giving up control of our lives. We are throwing our sinful lives on the mercy of God. We are inviting God to do what we can't do ourselves -- namely to raise the dead -- to change and recreate us.

Note that the command, "Repent" is in the present tense -- "Keep on repenting!" "Continually be repentant!" It isn't like a door we pass through once that gets us into the kingdom. Repentance is the ongoing lifestyle of the people in the kingdom -- more like walking in a really long tunnel.⁷

5. Repenting, is turning to God

- a) Sin is turning away from God to our own allegiances and priorities, our own ideas and views on what is important
- b) This is what causes darkness and suffering as people struggle against others to win arguments, or control the behaviour and thinking of others that don't measure up

6. We are constantly called to be reoriented back to God

- a) Jesus and the Holy Spirit are constantly there calling us, and empowering us to resist the temptation to yield to our fears, our own views and desires
- b) To refrain from making God in our own image, and acting as if our ways are his ways, hurting others and ourselves, and the reputation of Jesus Christ in the process

7. The religious people of Jesus' time were afraid that they and the people weren't measuring up to the righteous standards they felt God wanted

- a) They acted as if God was harsh and focused on the letter of the law
 - (1) They became fixated on the minutia of doctrine and religious practice
 - (2) They became discriminatory, divisive, unjust and uncaring
- b) As a result, they ended up opposing God himself in Jesus, and the work and message of the Kingdom he brought

⁷ Brian Stoffregen, Matthew 4:1-23, 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany - Year A <http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/matt4x12.htm>

c) All of us are called to repent of going away from God,
including in our religiosity and self-righteousness

¹⁷ From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*"

d) We are called to surrender our own priorities and views,
and humbly follow Jesus

* 4:17 Or has come, or is coming soon.

III. MATTHEW 4:18-22 FOLLOWING JESUS

A. MATTHEW 4:18-22

The First Disciples

¹⁸ One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. ¹⁹ Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” ²⁰ And they left their nets at once and followed him.

²¹ A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too.

²² They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind.

B. JESUS CALLS PETER AND ANDREW OUT OF THEIR WORLD TO FOLLOW HIM AND SHARE IN THE WORK OF THE KINGDOM

1. Andrew Prior

But he chose fishermen... we know that Matthew was a tax collector (10:2) but we have no idea what the other seven did for a living. Why?

It's because the living of these five disciples tells us more about Jesus, and more about repentance, and more about the kingdom of heaven that has come near, or as it can be translated, is already at hand.

Matthew show us even the most hated and most vile people— tax collectors, fully paid up members of the oppressive classes—can [be] repentant.

Fishermen...?

Fishermen were the lowest of the low. One of the philosophers of the day said that fishermen and fishmongers were on a par with money lenders and were socially despised as greedy thieves (Athenaeus 2nd century BCE. *Deipnosophistai*, 6.224b-28c).

Jesus calls everyone.⁸

2. Warren Carter adds:

⁸ Andrew Prior, *Counting the Cost - Matthew 4:12-23 - Epiphany 3*, <https://onemansweb.org/theology/life-on-the-beach-matthew-24-36-44/counting-the-cost-matthew-4-12-23-epiphany-3.html>

The two characters have a socially inferior and economically precarious existence under Roman control. It is among such vulnerable people that God's empire is first manifested.⁹

3. Jesus has rescued them from the dark and oppressive system they were caught in as fishermen and he calls them to help and rescue others
4. William Loader shows how this all fits with the great commission of Matthew 28

It is interesting that Matthew is not prepared to start with his story of Jesus proper without first identifying those who will carry it on. They, indeed, will be among those who bring its light into dark places in and beyond Galilee. The great commission of 28:18-20 is a fine commentary on this chapter. What the devil offered, authority over all nations, the Father has now given, not for power but for mission and service and that service has at its heart the message of the kingdom and as its servants not only Jesus but those whom he will commission and those commissioned by them in succeeding generations.

Fishing, like the image of the mustard seed, frequently has negative tones; here, not so; but the unfamiliar usage would have jolted hearers to something very distinctive happening here. It is not scalp hunting but seeking out people to follow, in the way that Jesus has sought out the disciples, engaging them in the vision and agenda of the kingdom which will widen their horizons taking them into dark and unfamiliar places, but with light and compassion.¹⁰

C. JESUS CALLS US IN THE SAME WAY FOR THE SAME PURPOSE

1. We are called out of darkness, out of the self-focused culture and world and mindsets we have been in
 - a) And we are called to work with him to reach others
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⁹ Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, A&C Black, 15 Feb. 2005, p. 122

¹⁰ William Loader, *Epiphany 3: 22 January, Matthew 4:12-23*,

CONCLUSION:

IV. MATTHEW 4:23-25

A. MATTHEW THEN GOES ON TO DESCRIBE THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

Crowds Follow Jesus

²³ Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. ²⁴ News about him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed—he healed them all. ²⁵ Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns,* Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River. ¹¹

B. SO MATTHEW HAS GIVEN US AN OVERALL PERSPECTIVE OF WHO JESUS IS, AND HIS MISSION

1. What his priorities were, what he taught and what he focused on doing
2. He reached out to all kinds of people in all kinds of places with all sorts of issues
3. This is how he taught and lived the good news of the Kingdom of God
4. And he called his disciples to learn from him to do the same

C. A CENTRAL QUESTION THEN, IS AS ANDREW PRIOR ASKS:

Who am I serving? Who is the most important person in the world; me or my neighbour?

What counts is who, and what, I am living for. Am I a beneficiary of the yoke and the bar across the shoulders of the poor? Am I effectively the rod of their

* 4:25 Greek *Decapolis*.

¹¹ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Mt 4:12–25). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

oppressor, effectively wearing the boots of the tramping warriors, or have I stepped out of that way of being?¹²

1. Brian Stoffregen talks about this new way of being, our joining in Jesus activities, and being lights to others outside our comfortable circles

Certainly Jesus is the "light" that shines -- and we are to be lights shining in the world (5:14, 16 -- note that it doesn't say "lights of/in the church!"), but what does that mean? First of all it means that the "mission field" for Jesus and us, is the world -- and especially those who "aren't us." The Hebrew from Isaiah for "Gentiles, *goyim*, basically means, non-Jews or heathens, similar to the Greek, *ethnos*.

Secondly, the activities of Jesus are summarized in the last verse of our text: "teaching, preaching, and healing" -- perhaps in simpler terms: "words and deeds." Our words and deeds need to be addressed to more than just church people. Even though Jesus had a "home base," he left that and went out among the people. What implications might this have concerning our congregations and their buildings and their ministries?

D. AS A CHURCH, AND AS INDIVIDUALS A VITAL PART OF OUR CALLING IS TO JOIN IN THE WORK OF JESUS

1. In reaching out to others

E. ALPHA

1. I have had some conversations with representatives from the Alpha ministry
2. Many of you are probably aware of them, and their efforts down through the years to reach out to unbelievers in a non-threatening and helpful way

F. NEXT WEEK WE PLAN TO SHOW A VIDEO EXAMPLE OF WHAT THEY CAN PROVIDE US

1. And in March we plan to have their local representative come and speak to us
2. Currently they have an advertising campaign featuring TV personality Bear Grills

¹² Andrew Prior, You gotta serve somebody..., <https://onemansweb.org/theology/life-on-the-beach-matthew-24-36-44/you-gotta-serve-somebody.html>

a) There have been substantial funds provided to finance this, as well as to provide materials and support to churches free of charge

3. They offer an evangelistic program and a marriage enrichment one.

a) It would be good if we take some time to consider what they offer, and if it would fit with what we would like to do in our community

4. This is certainly something to pray about and discuss

G. PRAYER
