

### The Beginning of our Lord's Galilean Ministry; The Call of Four Disciples

#### Matthew 4:12-25

Matthew 4:12-25 - *"Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. <sup>13</sup> And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup> that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: <sup>15</sup> "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: <sup>16</sup> The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."*

*<sup>17</sup> From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

*<sup>18</sup> And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers; Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."<sup>20</sup> They immediately left their nets and followed Him. <sup>21</sup> 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. He called them, <sup>22</sup> and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.*

*<sup>23</sup> And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. <sup>24</sup> Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. <sup>25</sup> Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan."*

#### Background Notes

In Matthew 4:1-11 we studied the testing of our Lord in the Judean wilderness. Between Matthew 4:11 and Matthew 4:12 there is a time gap of almost one year. From the early chapters of John's Gospel, we learn that almost a year of ministry in Jerusalem and Judea took place between these two verses. John 3:24 says, *"For John had not yet been thrown into prison."* And in Matthew 4:12 we read, *"Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee."* So between Matthew 4:11 and Matthew 4:12 there's about a year of ministry in Jerusalem and Judea. The events of the second half of Matthew 4 are still relatively early in our Lord's public ministry. The Lord's public ministry lasted about three and a half years, from His baptism until His crucifixion.

After John the Baptist was arrested, the Lord moved from Judea to Galilee, where He had grown up as a boy. He didn't move from Judea out of fear of Herod Antipas, the ruler who had arrested John, because Galilee was also under his jurisdiction. His move into the Galilee area, known as "Galilee of the Gentiles," foreshadowed the time when the Gospel would go out to the Gentile world, after His coming rejection by the Jews.

That rejection is anticipated in verse 13: *“And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali...”* The Lord left Nazareth because the Jews of Nazareth rejected His ministry. They tried to throw Him over a cliff after He had announced that He was the Messiah in the synagogue at Nazareth (you can read about that in Luke 4).

The Lord left his boyhood home and settled in Capernaum on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. This was in the region that had originally been settled by the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. All this was in fulfillment of Isaiah’s Messianic prophecy that is quoted here in verses 15-16: *“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. <sup>16</sup> The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”* This Messianic prophecy is from Isaiah 9:1-2. The “light” mentioned here is obviously Jesus Christ, the true Light of the World.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The Lord preached the Gospel of the Kingdom in the early days of His ministry.

*“From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (v17). And, “Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people” (v23).*

In the early days of our Lord’s ministry, His teaching ministry focused on the proclamation of “the Gospel of the Kingdom.” This was essentially the same message that John the Baptist preached. *“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3:1-2).* So, in the early days of our Lord’s ministry His teaching ministry focused on the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

“The Gospel of the Kingdom” was the Good News that the Messiah had arrived and His Kingdom (that was predicted and promised in Old Testament prophecy) was at hand. So, along with His miracles of healing, our Lord taught Jewish people in the synagogues of Galilee and proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom.

From Matthew 10 we learn that **this Gospel of the Kingdom was only presented to Jews** - not to Gentiles, and not to Samaritans. *“These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (Matthew 10:5-7).*

Unfortunately, the Jewish people rejected the Gospel of the Kingdom. They rejected the King and His offer of the Kingdom. In fact, in Matthew 12 the Jewish leaders of Israel attributed our Lord's miraculous works to the power of Satan! How shocking and how terrible!

As a result of this rejection in Matthew 12, the Lord began to teach in parables. In His parables, He began to teach about the form that the Kingdom would take for the present time. There would be the "wheat and the weeds" growing together until the end time. There would be "good and bad fish." There would be "wise and the foolish virgins." These parables describe the situation before the Lord returns to set up His earthly kingdom.

And in the meantime, the "Gospel of the Great Commission" would go out to the whole world! The Lord would set up the Church, which would include Jews and Gentiles together. Did you realize that the first mention of the Church in the Bible comes in Matthew 16:18 - after Jesus Christ was rejected by the Jewish nation? Matthew 16:18: *"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."*

Once the Jewish nation had rejected His offer of the Kingdom, the Lord began to speak to His disciples of His coming death and resurrection. Look at Matthew 16:21: *"From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day."* This revelation was not emphasized early in our Lord's ministry. Although the Lord mentioned to Nicodemus that "the Son of Man must be lifted up," His death was not emphasized in the early days of our Lord's ministry. The Gospel of the Kingdom was emphasized.

The Lord preached the Gospel of the Kingdom in the early days of His ministry.

## **2. The Lord called His first disciples in the early days of His ministry.**

In verses 18-22, Peter, Andrew, James, and John were called to be disciples. But don't get the idea that this was the first time these men saw the Lord, and that they left everything to follow a stranger who just happened to be walking along the beach and called them out of the blue! No. John 1 tells us that the Lord met Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Nathaniel months earlier, in Judea. You might call this event their "call to salvation," or their call to follow Jesus. He may have met some of the other disciples at this time as well. In any case, at the beginning of our Lord's Galilean ministry, we have the call to discipleship of Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

We find more details of this call in Luke 5:11: *"So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him."* The fact that the Lord called these four disciples out of their secular jobs of fishing doesn't mean that all Christians must leave their jobs in order to be disciples of the Lord Jesus! The Lord doesn't call all of His committed followers out of secular employment. Some believers are called to make a job change, but certainly not all! In fact, the Lord wants His disciples to be sprinkled around in all areas of work and living.

And the fact that James and John left their father Zebedee doesn't mean that we must leave home and family to be disciples. In fact, just the opposite is true. Becoming a disciple does **not** relieve us of family responsibilities!

The point here is **priorities**. Becoming a disciple means that the Lord must be Number One - in reference to our livelihood and in reference to our family ties. Certainly we see this teaching in the call of the first disciples.

The Lord called His first disciples in the early days of His ministry.

## Practical Application

### Don't forget your background!

Do you think that the Lord used the background of these disciples who were fishermen? Of course He did! Verse 19: *"Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."* Think of all the principles and techniques of fishing that these disciples could now apply in evangelism. Go where the fish are! Use the right bait! Know when to draw in the net!

God can - and will - use your background in what He calls you to do. Just as the Lord used David's background as a shepherd and dealing with sheep to prepare him for being a king and dealing with people, so the Lord used the background of these disciples to prepare them for being fishers of men.

The Lord will use your background in some way to prepare you for what He wants you to do in your service for Him. I'm constantly amazed at how much the Lord has used my background in engineering in my present teaching ministry with students. So, whatever your background was before you became a Christian, God can use it for His glory. Don't forget your background!