

Matthew 4:12 – 25

^{4:12} Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, he withdrew into Galilee; ¹³ and leaving Nazareth, he came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. ¹⁴ This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: ¹⁵ ‘The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – ¹⁶ the people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned.’ ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ ¹⁸ Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who was 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 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. ²³ Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. ²⁴ The news about him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and he healed them. ²⁵ Large crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Galilee Before Jesus:* Long ago, in 721 BC, the Assyrian Empire had taken over the northern Galilee section of Israel and Samaria starting with ‘the land of Zebulun and Naphtali.’ The prophet Isaiah (Isa.9:1 in Mt.4:15 – 16) had foretold that that land, first to be conquered, would be the first to see the light dawning on Israel.
- *Galilee at the Time of Jesus:* The non-Jewish ruler Herod Antipas had taken John the Baptist (Jesus’ cousin and predecessor) into custody because John criticized his adulterous marriage (Mt.14:1 – 12). Herod’s territory was in purple on the map (right), marked ‘Galilea’ and ‘Perea.’ Hence, Jesus began his ministry in a dangerous region politically.
- *Jewish Hope:* Since the Babylonian takeover in 586 BC, all the Jews had been ruled by a foreign power. Almost all Jews hoped for a military Messiah to oust the Romans, inaugurating the ‘kingdom of heaven/God’ in a new sort of ‘independence day.’



Questions

1. (optional) What do we learn about Jesus? And what do learn about him recruiting partners?
2. What questions do you have about this passage? (Hopefully, they match with the questions below somewhat. Tackle them in the general order, below.)
3. Why does Jesus start in the Galilee area?
 - a. He's courting danger! He starts in the region under the governance of Herod Antipas, who didn't like John the Baptist for telling him the truth about his lifestyle.
 - b. Because Jesus wants to heal people who lived in the region where destruction first entered Israel.
 - c. On the theme of Jesus retelling our stories, this is significant. God, through Jesus, heals sin in a certain order. Jesus is now healing Israel in the place where Israel's sin had the first major consequence, the Assyrian invasion.
 - d. Illus: Leader share a personal story about how Jesus starts to undo our sinful tendencies
4. What is Jesus' preaching? What is this kingdom of heaven?
 - a. State: Recall that in the last passage, Mt.3:13 – 4:11, Jesus retold part of Israel's story. He went through water and wilderness, like Israel went through water and wilderness when God brought them out of Egypt. So there is an Exodus retelling going on here. When God brought Israel out of Egypt, a bunch of other people joined them (Ex.12:49). They became part of multi-ethnic Israel. Now, God is bringing 'Israel' in the person of Jesus through another Exodus, and a bunch of other people are joining him (Mt.4:12 – 25).
 - b. A kingdom is made of a King and subjects. Note: v.23 uses the word 'gospel' or 'good news' (euangelion). But the euangelion ('good news') was also a political proclamation of the Roman Empire that a new Emperor had been born or had ascended the throne. That was the 'good news' of Rome. Here, Jesus announces 'good news' in the midst of another kingdom.
 - c. In the passage, what signs are there that a kingdom is breaking forth? Followers, for one. Miracles demonstrating Jesus' power over evil, suffering, demons.
 - d. What is Jesus fighting? Disease, human brokenness, demons, evil.
 - e. PRACTICAL APPLICATION: What are the aspects of darkness (figuratively) we face here in our culture?
 - i. Illus: In my role as a campus staff worker at Boston College, I've watched students follow Jesus into throwing alternative fun events. The areas of darkness they are engaging with are issues of loneliness and alcoholism, since BC has a lot of alcohol-based parties. At times, I've given them up to \$50 in 'venture capital fun money' to spend on non-alcoholic things: a cheesecake baking party, an Asian shaved ice dessert night, a movie and games night, an 'Amazing Race' series on campus. We've even invited non-Christian seekers to help organize these events with us. Much like Levi the tax collector throwing a party so that Jesus could meet his tax-collector buddies, we throw these parties so people could glimpse Jesus.
 - ii. Notice that Jesus calls people into ACTIVITY WITH HIM. Not just activity, constantly – there is rest and prayer and all kinds of other things too. But Jesus does not call his disciples to sit in a pew, or sit in a coffee shop... listen... talk... and *maybe* do something. He calls them straight into ACTIVITY WITH HIM. I've also called people – including non-Christians – straight into Global Poverty Impact groups (learning about how to give money to the global poor) or into manning a large interactive display on campus on race, or evil, or some other issue.
 - iii. So, what are the things that damage us? Eating disorders, loneliness, being totally stressed out, greed, injustice, etc.? Jesus is engaging those issues all the time. Where do you sense his heart for people?
5. How do you think Jesus looks at the people who sat in darkness? The people with all the diseases and demonic problems?
 - a. Illus: If you've ever had someone you love get sick or hurt, or even a pet get sick or hurt, how did that feel? Can you kind of understand how Jesus felt towards his people?
 - b. Illus: Remember the scene from *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* where Wolverine sees all the mutants locked up in cages in William Striker's lab? He gets mad about how they are being treated, so he breaks them all out.

- c. What do you think Jesus felt about things not being right? The people were vulnerable, they had lost a hero in John the Baptist, they were affected by their own sin, and they were separated from God. So he starts to free them from things.
 - d. Jesus is not afraid of the places of brokenness in our lives. He is drawn like a moth to the fire to those places, in fact.
6. Why does Jesus call people to repent?
- a. What is repentance? A turning from one to another, a switching of sides. It doesn't mean 'to grovel.' To repent is to turn from everything else and follow Jesus!
 - b. They needed to approach him as king. That's what no one had done yet. This is not just about behavior modification, or a social program. Jesus is establishing a relationship where he is king and we are subjects. Do we believe this?
 - c. The following comparison might be helpful, if you have people who have a 'get people from heaven to earth' perspective on Christian faith:

	Get people from earth to heaven	Bring heaven to earth through people
Is heaven mainly a future or present reality?	Future	Present
What does Jesus do with our sin?	He forgives it	He forgives it, but also calls us to repent from it
What is evangelism?	Proclaiming Jesus as Savior	Proclaiming Jesus as Lord (Can Jesus be Savior but not Lord?)
This tends to lead Christians to do...what?	Attend a church?	Apprenticeship

7. Following Jesus: What do you think of Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John's very abrupt decision to follow Jesus?
- a. What are they leaving behind?
 - i. Fishing was not a 'minimum wage job.' They were leaving behind decent jobs, and their fathers who taught them to fish.
 - ii. What do you think they are hoping for?
 - b. If someone announced on campus that a new campus government and administration was at hand, would you listen to it? What if you knew it was going to be way better, with a better dining plan, better housing, etc. Or that in our country, a new federal government was at hand, would you believe it? Would you live in the old reality or the new?
 - c. What do they know at this point? That something very exciting is happening. And that they are being called to be 'fishers of men.' What does that mean to them? Influence in drawing others to Jesus, a role to play in this kingdom, etc.
 - d. Even if you are not a Christian, one way to get to know Jesus is to partner with him in what he's doing. Can you help us organize a fun event as a way to care about other people? Can you go with us to meet homeless people in Boston Common one Saturday? Then as we reflect on what we learn about loving others in partnership with Jesus, we will get to know him better.
APPLICATION: Consider partnering with us to love people.
 - e. APPLICATION: What is it that keeps you from following Jesus?
8. What does it mean to be 'fishers of men'?
- a. Not merely ATTENDANCE: Pew-sitting? 'Going to church on Sunday'? Spectating? Or an individualized piety alone?
 - b. APPRENTICESHIP. That we are involved evangelistically with drawing people into this kingdom, to meet Jesus as King. We are not passive recipients and spectators. We become active vessels of Jesus' activity. From here, Jesus is training his disciples in what to say and how to act. Then he will launch them into activity of their own in Matthew 10.