

The Book of Matthew is not a perfect chronology of Jesus' life; it is a perfect witness of it. It is organized around five discourses (chapters 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 23-25; Osborne, 23).

### Jesus Begins His Ministry

**4:12 Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.**

**4:13 And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,**

**4:14 so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:**

**4:15 "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,  
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—**

**4:16 the people dwelling in darkness**

**have seen a great light,**

**and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,**

**on them a light has dawned."**

**4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

Jesus' true identity as the Son of God was revealed at His baptism (Matt. 3:17). He then successfully withstood the temptations of the devil in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11). After that Jesus stayed in Nazareth in the south for some time (Jn. 1-5) and His ministry overlapped with John the Baptist's ministry, but we have no idea of how much time elapsed between verses 11 and 12; it may have even been between 1 to 2 years. Prior to Matthew 4:12 Jesus turned water into wine (Jn. 2:1-11), cleansed the temple at Passover (Jn. 2:13-22), was interviewed by Nicodemus (Jn. 3:1-21), and **John the Baptist was arrested** for denouncing the marriage of the tetrarch Herod Antipas to his brother's wife (Lk. 3:19-20). This began a new phase in Jesus' ministry. Jesus took John's arrest as a signal from God to move from the area. So, He left Nazareth and moved to Capernaum (a tiny town on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee). In doing so He fulfilled Isaiah 9:1-2 (Matt. 4:15-16). Once more divine providence is at work; Jesus moved due to circumstances, but in doing so God fulfilled His prophetic purposes. It should be noted that Jesus, like John, would be arrested and killed, but His arrest and death would be on His timetable, not Herod's timetable. He would not give up His life until after He had taught, after He had displayed the power of God, and after the disciples were fully prepared to carry on the spread of the gospel. Capernaum would also prove more responsive than Nazareth (compare 9:1-2; 11:23; 13:54-57).

Matthew 4:15 and 16 quote Isaiah 9:1-2.

**Zebulun and Naphtali** were together in the northern part of Galilee and were allotted land surrounding the Sea of Galilee on the western side and north of the lake. . . The "**way of the sea**" probably refers to the important road that in both Isaiah's day and Jesus' time went from Damascus through Galilee to the Mediterranean Sea (the Romans called it the *Via Maris*, the Latin term, meaning "Way of the Sea"; Osborne, 142, 143). It was one of three major trade routes in ancient Israel. The Way of the Sea connected the major routes in the Fertile Crescent (the area spanning modern-day Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt). The other major route, the King's Highway, was located to the east along the high fertile plain beyond the Dead Sea and the Jordan River. The two routes converged on

Damascus, where the route splits toward Antioch (Turkey) to the north, and towards Mesopotamia (Iraq) to the east.

The fact that Galilee is called "**Galilee of the gentiles**" ("Galilee of the nations") reflects the region's presence of non-Jews. This was a result of the Assyrian conquest (2 Ki. 17:24-34). When the Assyrians conquered Israel, they deliberately repopulated the area with foreigners to help prevent the rise of nationalism and revolt from those left in the land. Furthermore, because it was the neighbor of Syria and on a major trade route a large population of foreigners lived in and came through Galilee making the region undesirable to the Jews in the south. Yet, it was in despised Galilee that the light of salvation dawned.

In Isaiah 9:2 the people in darkness are undoubtedly the Jews living in the pagan Galilee apart from the spiritual center in Jerusalem, while for Matthew "**in darkness**" refers to the spiritual depravity into which the nation had descended. The "**great light**" is God's new revelation in Jesus (Osborne, 143).

What Isaiah says about Galilee foreshadows Jesus' mission to the gentiles.

Formally Jesus' message was identical to John's message: "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**" However, there is a subtle difference due to the progression of the narrative. "At hand" ("near") is somewhat vague. It could mean "impending", that is, the kingdom will soon arrive. Or, it could mean the kingdom was close, nearer than anyone had thought. When John preached "the kingdom is at hand", he had the former meaning in mind for he was the forerunner of Jesus; from his perspective the kingdom was coming though it had not yet arrived. When Jesus preached "the kingdom is at hand" He had the latter meaning in mind; it was closer than people imagined; His ministry was already shedding light on the Gentiles. Although the kingdom can still be spoken of as "coming" (future), it was also present in Jesus' ministry. For example, in Matthew 12:28 Jesus said if He could cast out demons by the Spirit of God, the kingdom *has come*. This theme of "already/not yet" is found throughout the NT (Carson, God with Us, 29).

Repentance is the preparation needed to enter the kingdom of heaven. Repentance has intellectual, emotional, and volitional aspects to it. Berkhof says, there is a change of view, a recognition of sin as involving personal guilt, defilement, and helplessness. There is a change of feeling, manifesting itself in sorrow for sin committed against a holy God. There is a change of purpose, an inward turning away from sin, and a disposition to seek pardon and cleansing (Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 486). Repentance "calls for total surrender, total commitment to the will of God. ... It embraces the whole walk of the new man who is claimed by the divine lordship. It carries with it the founding of a new personal relation of man to God.... It awakens joyous obedience for a life according to God's will" (TDNT, 4:1002-3).

Genuine repentance pleads with the Lord to forgive and deliver from the burden of sin and the fear of judgment and hell. It is the attitude of the publican who, fearful of even looking toward heaven, smote his breast and cried, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" (Luke 18:13). Repentance is not merely behavior reform; true repentance involves a change of heart and purpose, it inevitably results in a change of behavior.

Although Jesus will leave Galilee from time to time, it is not until Matthew 16:21 that He departs for Judea and the climatic scenes of the Gospel will be set. He will then return to Galilee after His death and proclaim His Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20).

**Jesus Calls the First Disciples** (cf. Mark 1:16-20)

**4:18 While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.**

**4:19 And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."**

**4:20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him.**

**4:21 And 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.**

**4:22 Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.**

The **Sea of Galilee**, also known as Lake Gennesaret or the Sea of Tiberias, is 12  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles long by 8  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles wide and 682 feet below sea level. In Jesus' day it had flourishing fisheries. (For more details of the land formations around the lake see Broadus, 77).

Soon after Jesus began to preach of the coming of the kingdom, He called the first four of His disciples to follow Him.

First mentioned are Peter and Andrew who were casting nets into the sea. No boat is mentioned so they may have been casting from shore. Peter and Andrew had evidently followed Jesus earlier shortly after Jesus was baptized by John (Jn. 1:35-51), but apparently had gone back to their occupations, unaware that Jesus was asking them to follow Him without interruption. The disciples' commitment to Christ advanced by degrees.

Jesus then called James and John who were repairing torn nets. According to Luke 5:10 they were partners with Peter and Andrew. Hired servants were also present (Mk. 1:20).

Some conclude that the disciples were poor, ignorant men who gave up little to gain much. But such is not the case. Family businesses like these were especially profitable. They were probably lower middle-class workers, but that meant they were not among the roughly 90 percent of the ancient population that we would call peasants. Even if disciples had only followed Jesus during certain seasons of the year, they could not easily return to abandoned businesses (IVP Commentary). Peter reminded everyone in Matthew 19:27 that the Twelve had given up much to follow Jesus.

Repentance is necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven. Repentance is a total change in mind and heart that involves a new lifestyle and new allegiance to God and Christ. This change of direction is demonstrated in verses 20 and 22: The disciples immediately left their nets, boat, and father and followed Jesus.

These verses stress two things: the immediacy of their response and the radical nature of it. There was no hesitation. The way the scene is written, they don't even take time to pull their catch to shore! Secondly, it is radical; they gave up everything.

By "**follow**" Jesus meant to physically go where He went (cf. Jn. 12:26). Each was required to leave his former occupation, income, possessions, and relationships in order to travel with Jesus throughout Galilee. Nevertheless, it should be noted that following Jesus did not necessarily mean that a disciple would never see his family again. Peter's house was used as a base of ministry (8:14). In addition, the group used the fishing boat to travel around the lake (8:23; 9:1; 13:2; 14:13, 22; 15:39).

The disciples' new occupation was to fish for men. Jesus' use of this metaphor is brilliant. In the OT those who were netted were "caught" for God's judgment (Jer. 16:16; Amos 4:2; Hab. 1:14-15), while here they are "caught" to avoid judgment (Osborne, 149). In 13:47-50 the same metaphor is used where the "catching" leads some to judgment and others to salvation.

#### APPLICATION:

These stories demonstrate not only the relative worthlessness of possessions but also the incomparable value of what believers' gain. The kingdom is like a precious treasure, worth the abandonment of all other treasures (Matt. 13:44-46). The call to discipleship is a call to commit one's life to Jesus.

Although committing our life to Christ requires personal sacrifice, we know that even during Jesus' earthly ministry every believer was not asked to quit their jobs and follow Him. He had many followers who remained in their homes and occupations.

We may not have to give up our jobs, but we have to give up allegiance to ourselves or to anyone or any system contrary to God's purposes. . . We may remain in our workplace. We may perform the same tasks. But now we employ our work to serve the new kingdom and our new master. We still work to bring home a paycheck, but at a deeper level we also work to serve people, as our master did. When you serve people because of your allegiance to Christ, "you serve the Lord Christ," as Paul puts it (Colossians 3:24).

So we see that although a call from Jesus may or not change *what* we do for a living, it always changes *why* we work. As followers of Jesus, we work above all to serve Him. In turn, this leads to a change in how we work, and especially how we treat other people. The ways of the new King include compassion, justice, truth, and mercy; the ways of the old prince of this world are devastation, apathy, oppression, deceit, and vindictiveness. (Theology of Work Bible Commentary)

#### Jesus Ministers to Great Crowds (Mark 1:35-39; Luke 4:42-44)

**4:23 And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.**

**4:24 So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them.**

**4:25 And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.**

**Galilee** is a relatively small area, about 40 miles wide and 70 miles long. But according to the Jewish historian, Josephus (who wrote a generation later), Galilee had over 200 cities and villages each with more than 15,000 people (Carson, *God with Us*, 30). If Jesus and His disciples could visit two or three a day, it would take them a good three months to go to them all. Jesus must have had tremendous endurance. This was the first circuit around Galilee; a second takes place in 9:35.

As Jesus traveled, He taught in the synagogues, proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom, and healed every disease and every affliction among the people.

Teaching and **proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom** cannot be differentiated with hard lines.

**Teaching** involved instruction, communicating the nature and purpose of God's kingdom. This took place primarily in the synagogues during the regular weekly Sabbath where the OT was explained.

**Proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom** was preaching the good news that God's kingdom was near. The proclamation was aimed at bringing about conversion (Dodd, 7-8; Guelich, 43).

**"Healing every disease and every affliction among the people"** means that Jesus healed every kind of sickness of everyone who came to Him, not that He healed every ill person in Galilee. By moving from general to specific diseases, Matthew emphasizes that Jesus had power over every disease imaginable.

The kingdom of heaven is free from sin and sin's effects. Jesus demonstrated His authority by rolling back the effects of the curse in healing the sick and casting out demons. In Matthew 11:2-5, when John the Baptist was in prison, he sent his disciples to Jesus seeking affirmation that He was the Messiah. Jesus said to John's disciples, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them." In Acts 2:22 Peter preached, "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a Man **attested** to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst." In short, Jesus' healings were an attestation of His messiahship.

Interestingly, even though the disciples were eventually called upon to preach and heal (10:7-8), Matthew never uses the word "teach" of their ministry until after Jesus (the "one teacher" – Matt. 23:8,10) was no longer present (Matt. 28:20; France, 150).

Such expressions as **"He went throughout all Galilee"** or **"His fame spread throughout all Syria"** should be simply taken to mean that He had an extensive ministry (Syria included Palestine and the lands to the north. However, this could also be specifically referring to the lands north of Galilee since Galilee is also mentioned - Osborne, 156). Jesus' fame spread far and wide. As verse 25 says, **"Great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan."**

#### APPLICATION:

Jesus cared about the whole person. He was most concerned about their spiritual well-being but did not ignore their physical, felt-needs. His example summons us to a more well-rounded ministry in which we teach and preach but also show compassion, care and help to those who are suffering.

This renewed vision of Jesus' compassion can encourage us in our prayers. When we care for people's brokenness as Jesus does, we can bring their pain to God in prayer with greater confidence. . . Although God always has the right to do as He wills, we would pray with greater faith if we recognized His compassion. (IVP New Testament Commentary)