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The Ministry of Jesus Begins

Scripture: Matthew 4:12-25

Sermon Series: *Matthew*

Topic: Jesus, Fulfillment, Preaching, Teaching, Healing

Introduction

This morning we will consider the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Last week we considered the first half of chapter four. Matthew took us into the wilderness with Jesus where for forty days he did not eat while being tested by God and tempted by the devil. Jesus passed every test and refused every temptation.

Jesus fought the lies of the devil with the truth of God's word. Jesus willingly obeyed his heavenly Father even though he was physically weak, he was spiritually strong. He chose to worship God the Father above self or Satan. He depended upon the Holy Spirit. Satan attacked Jesus because he is the Son of God. Jesus majestically conducted himself like the royal Son of God. He submitted himself to the will of the Father, he resisted the devil, and then the devil fled from him. Angels were then sent to Jesus to strengthen and feed him. That takes us to verse 11 where we left off last week.

Today we pick up in verse 12. Matthew does not tell us this, but we know from the other gospels—the gospel of John in particular—that about a year¹ has passed² between v. 11 and v. 12. We'll return to this in a bit to fill in some of the gaps, but for now, keep this fact in mind.

Today's text, 4:12-25, naturally divides into three parts. The ministry of Jesus begins in three stages. First, Jesus moves from Nazareth to Capernaum (vs. 12-17). Second, he calls the first disciples (vs. 18-22). Third, he begins preaching, teaching, and healing (vs. 23-25).

From Nazareth to Capernaum (v.12-17)

We see the first stage of the beginning of Jesus' ministry in vs. 12-17. Here we are told that he moves house from Nazareth, where he grew up, to Capernaum, which is located along the

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 62.

² See John 1-4.

northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. *What Matthew wants to communicate is that there is a theological reason for this move.*

Matthew 4:12-17 (ESV) ¹² Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

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

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."

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

Thus far in Matthew's gospel he has emphasized "fulfillment." Already in these first four chapters he has pointed to 10 aspects of messianic fulfillment that have unfolded surrounding the birth and early life of Jesus.³ Now he is telling us of an eleventh. Jesus has already fulfilled eleven prophetic pointers to the identity of messiah and he has not even yet started his ministry! This is incredible.

Matthew is here describing the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. The time has now come, or as Mark records Jesus saying, "the time is fulfilled" (Mk. 1:15). As I noted earlier, there is gap in time between verses 11 and 12, which is about a one year period and has been called "a year of obscurity."⁴ During this time Jesus spent most of his time in and around Galilee, but he did make at least one trip to Jerusalem. Matthew does not mention this since what took place during this time is unimportant to him for his purposes. However, it may be helpful for us to know.

The Year of Obscurity

John's gospel tells us that immediately after Jesus' baptism, John said about Jesus—at least to his disciples—that he was "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of world!*"⁵ Upon hearing this, two of John's disciples began following Jesus.⁶ One of them was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, and the other, though unnamed, is thought by many scholars to be John himself. Andrew then introduces his brother Peter to Jesus. Jesus then met Philip and Nathaniel.

³ See Appendix, "Fulfillment in Matthew" at the end of this document.

⁴ *ESV Study Bible*, note at Matthew 4:12.

⁵ John 1:29, 36.

⁶ John 1:35-40.

Jesus and this group of new friends were invited to a wedding in Cana, which became the occasion of Jesus' first miracle (Jn. 2:1-11). Soon thereafter Jesus and friends went up to Jerusalem for Passover, where Jesus found the moneychangers buying and selling within the temple complex and Jesus drove them out⁷ (Jn. 2:13-17). Jesus was noticed a Pharisee named Nicodemus, who requested a secret, late night meeting (Jn. 3:1-21). After this conversation Jesus then departed Jerusalem and heading north spent some time in the Judean wilderness where he and his disciples began to baptize people. John, at this time, was still preaching and baptizing in the wilderness, thus for some short season, both of their ministries overlapped (Jn. 3:22-36). Jesus and friends were soon begin baptizing more people than was John.⁸ After a brief time, of perhaps a few months, Jesus decided to return home by way of Samaria where he met the woman at the well and then spent a few days among the Samaritans, and then returned to Galilee (Jn. 4:1-45).

Mostly Private Ministry

These events are essentially private or largely unknown by the Jewish religious establishment in Jerusalem. The miracle in Cana was only known to be a miracle by the servants who carried the water now turned to wine to the Master of the Ceremony and the disciples. Nicodemus met Jesus in the secret of night. Jesus spent a few days in Samaria with the townspeople and the woman he met by the well, but no Jew cared anything about what happened in Samaria. So Jesus, at this point is still "flying under the radar." After leaving Samara, he returned to Galilee.

The Arrest of John the Baptist

It is about this time that Matthew picks up the story. John's arrest changes things for Jesus. Matthew notes that John was arrested and so Jesus began to move. John was arrested by Herod Antipas because he kept telling Herod that is was sinful for him to have married his sister-in-law.⁹ It's a sin to steal your brother's wife and John told Herod this. John's arrest appears to be the catalyst of a shift in Jesus' ministry. "***After hearing of John's arrest,***" Jesus *then* decided to begin a new phase in his ministry. John had been preaching in the wilderness that the kingdom of God was coming, but after his arrest that preaching stopped. It appears that Jesus understood this to be his cue for him to begin a formal preaching ministry. And so we see,

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

"***From that time,***" means from the time that John was arrested. Jesus began to preach when John was no longer able to preach. And he preached the exact same message as did John. Matthew tells us that John used these very same words when he preached (see Mt. 3:2). Jesus

⁷ Jesus will do the same a second time near the end of his ministry (Mt. 21:12-13).

⁸ John 3:26; 4:1-3.

⁹ Matthew 14:3-4.

and John preached the same message. The kingdom of heaven was at hand, therefore, "Repent and be prepared! Turn away from you sin if you want to enter in!"

The Move Into Galilee

At this time, Jesus decides to leave his home town of Nazareth and move about 18 miles northeast to the town of **Capernaum**. The name means "village of Nahum,"¹⁰ which may refer to the prophet Nahum.

This was the location of Peter's house.¹¹ The town was located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. This body of water is known by many names, such as the Sea of Chinnereth, Lake of Gennesaret, or the Sea of Tiberias.¹² It is about 13 miles long and 7 miles wide.

During Jesus' day it was the center of a thriving fishing and trade industry. It was situated near the border of two districts under control of two of Herod's sons, Herod Antipas and Philip. Capernaum was also Matthew's home town since his tax booth was located on the border so he could tax the coming and going of the local traders.¹³

However, the most important fact about Capernaum for Matthew is that it was located near the border of the land that had been designated to the two tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun. Matthew again and again emphasizes geography.¹⁴ He does this because geography is inseparably connected to rightly revealing the true identifying of messiah. Look again at 4:14-16. Jesus' move to Galilee **fulfilled** something spoken of by Isaiah. Matthew quotes Isaiah 9:1-2 here in verses 15 and 16.

Matthew 4:15-16 (ESV) ¹⁵ "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness



¹⁰ Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 256.

¹¹ Matthew 8:14; Mk 1:29; 2:1.

¹² *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, 1173.

¹³ See Matthew 9:1, 9.

¹⁴ Whether it be Bethlehem (2:1), or Egypt (2:13), or Ramah (2:18), or Nazareth (2:23), or the wilderness (3:3).

have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned.”

The region of Galilee encompassed the land that made up the historic location of two tribes of Israel, Naphtali and Zebulun. This fact is noteworthy because when Isaiah spoke about messiah, he connected the arrival of messiah with the region of Galilee. We read these words every Christmas season.

Isaiah 9:6-7 (ESV) ⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.

Isaiah explained that this *child to be born*, this *son who would carry the government* of God's people, would arise *“from the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali... the glorious way by the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles”* (Isa. 9:1). He is speaking about the appearance of messiah. The *Wonderful Counselor* would come *from “Galilee of the Gentiles.”* Galilee had historically been populated by a majority of Gentiles. The Gentile roots in this region went all the way back to time of Joshua and the conquest of the Promised Land. It is amazing that the revelation of messiah would be connected to a predominately Gentile region! The glory of God would begin shine out into the world *from Galilee of the Gentiles!* The Prince of Peace would arise *from Galilee of the Gentiles.* The Everlasting Governor of God's kingdom who would sit on David's throne would begin dawn on the world *from Galilee of the Gentiles!* This is amazing.

The Gentiles who *“walked in darkness”* would see a great light because he would begin to shine upon them *from Galilee.* Those who *“dwelt in the land of deep darkness”* would begin to see a gloriously good light shining upon them *from Galilee.* The Jewish messiah, who comes to bring salvation to the Jews, would begin to shine *from within Galilee* of the Gentiles.

This is remarkable. Yes, *“salvation is from the Jews,”*¹⁵ but that same *“salvation”* first shines from *“Galilee of the Gentiles.”* Matthew is the most Jewish of all the gospels and yet from the

¹⁵ John 4:22.

opening paragraphs he has again and again¹⁶ illustrated the point that the Jewish messiah is also the Savior of the Gentiles. Jesus intentionally moved into this region in order to fulfill this 700 year old prophecy spoke of by Isaiah. The kingdom of heaven has now dawned and its first shining began to illuminate the land of Gentiles. Jesus is not merely a national savior. Jesus is a global Savior!

Jesus Calls Disciples (v.18-22)

The second stage of Jesus' ministry takes place with Jesus calling the first disciples.

Matthew 4:18-22 (ESV) 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. 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 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. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

What I find most striking about this passage is the immediacy with which these four dropped everything and followed Jesus. These four men left everything and followed Jesus. They left these jobs, their livelihood, their occupation, even their father in order to obey the call of Jesus. They four men were totally in, completely sold out for Jesus.

This begs the question of what had happened before that enabled them to respond in this way? We need to recall that these four men have now known Jesus for about a year. They have at least seen him turn water to wine, they have witnessed him clearing out the temple of the moneychangers, and they have heard him teaching in Samaria.

Furthermore, Luke tells (5:1-11) us that earlier that morning, after having spent all night fruitlessly fishing, Jesus told them to go back out into the deep water and fish again. They reluctantly obeyed and they took in a haul of fish that all four of them with both of their boats could not fully contain. Then after they brought this catch ashore, Jesus said to them, "From now on you will be catching men" (Lk. 5:11).

Thus, when Jesus says, "**Follow me,**" they were ready. They heard his command and his voice must have carried a new sense of urgency that convinced them that something was now different. A new stage in Jesus' ministry had begun.

"**Follow me,**" is a command. This is not a suggestion. This is an imperative. The time had now come for them to learn from Jesus "**how to become fishers of men.**" These four men, two sets

¹⁶ He included Gentiles in the genealogy of Jesus

of brothers, left everything and followed Jesus. They left the jobs to follow him. James and John even left the father. If this seems harsh to you, don't worry because Mark records that the father was not left completely alone, but there were "*hired servants*" there with him (Mk. 1:20).

Will You Obey His Call?

The message for us is that we each face a moment of decision when we must individually decide whether or not we will obey Jesus' call or not. These men had been with Jesus for a while, watching him and listening to him. Now was time to follow him full time.

Some of us have been hanging around Jesus too, but not truly following him. Many of us know lots of information about Jesus, but we simply haven't decided to follow him. We know lots of factual information about him, but we haven't yet went all in. We've listened to him teach and preach and yet, we're still vacillating between two opinions. Jesus would say, "Follow me." It's time to make up your mind. If Jesus truly is the Son of God, then stop playing games. "Follow me" means that we totally surrender our lives to Jesus. It means we apply ourselves wholeheartedly to pleasing him about ourselves. Is he the Son of God or not? If he is, then follow him. If he is not, then move on.

Do you hear his voice? Is he saying to you this morning, "Follow me." Will you obey him? If you hear his voice today, then do not harden your heart and continue in rebellion against him. Obey him. Surrender your life to him today. Do it now, even as I'm preaching.

Preaching, Teaching, and Healing (v.23-25)

The third stage unfolds as Jesus begins preaching, teaching, and healing.

Matthew 4:23-25 (ESV) 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. 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. ²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

In addition to these verses, also look back at v.17.

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

The ministry of Jesus is marked by preaching (v.17), teaching (v.23), and healing (v.23). We could sum this up by saying that the ministry of Jesus is comprised of *word* and *work*.

The word translated '*preaching*' is the word *kēryssō*, (κηρύσσω) which means "to publicly announce religious truths and principles while urging acceptance and compliance."¹⁷ Look at what Jesus is doing. He was announcing the coming of the kingdom of heaven and then calling for the response of repentance. The truth is that God's kingdom was now present because God's king was now present. The king of the kingdom had stepped onto the world scene and his name is Jesus. The appropriate response to the arrival of that king and that kingdom is repentance of sin. Jesus was like herald going throughout the land announcing the coming of God's kingdom and then "urging acceptance of and compliance" to that reality. This is what preaching does. It rightly announces biblical truth and then calls for an appropriate response to that truth.

Jesus was also "*teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom*" (v.23). The word 'teaching' is *didáskō* (διδάσκω), which means "to instruct; to impart information; to pass on knowledge."¹⁸ Thus, Jesus was instructing people on the *truth* of the kingdom. He was conveying *information* of which they were not aware. He was imparting *knowledge* about the kingdom of God which they did not have or at least did not fully understand. We will turn our attention to what he was teaching next week as we look at the Sermon on the Mount.

What's the Difference Between Preaching and Teaching?

Notice the difference between preaching and teaching. *Preaching* is aimed at announcing facts about the kingdom of God, but then calling for a response based upon those facts. *Teaching* is simply instructing rightly about the kingdom of God. Teaching is imparting knowledge about God and his gospel, while preaching calls for a response. Teaching gives truth, while preaching calls for the hearer to *respond*, to act upon that truth.

What Is the Gospel?

Notice also that what Jesus was preaching and teaching about was the **gospel**. What is the gospel?

The gospel begins with God. God is good and he created all things good. Yet, man chose to reject God's goodness, opting instead for a disobedient shortcut that brought down God's just curse upon this world. Man sinned against God which opened the door for sin and death to enter God's good world. Thus the whole world is now not good, but abides under the curse of God. Yet God chose not to immediately give man what he justly deserved, which was death. "The wages of sin is death." God chose to delay his judgment and be gracious by sending his own holy Son into this cursed world.

¹⁷ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 416.

¹⁸ Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, "Διδάσκω, Διδάσκαλος, Νομοδιδάσκαλος, Καλοδιδάσκαλος, Ψευδοδιδάσκαλος, Διδασκαλία, Ἐτεροδιδασκαλέω, Διδαχή, Διδάκτος, Διδακτικός," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 135.

God's Holy Son is Jesus who willingly entered our cursed and broken world in order to take upon himself God's just curse against our sin. The curse is death and thus, Jesus died. Jesus, even though absolutely holy and completely innocent, willingly died. He was buried in a cold, stone tomb. He remained dead in that tomb for three days.

Then, on the third day, he rose from the dead and showed himself alive to his disciples. Jesus then ascended alive into heaven to join his Father on the throne of the universe. But before he ascended into heaven, he gathered his disciples and told them to go into all the world and tell every sinner that there is a way to escape death and God's just judgment against sin. And that way is by believing whole heartedly that Jesus is God's resurrected Son, who fully paid the price for all your sin. Therefore, you are to confess your sins, surrender your life to Jesus, and receive His promised Holy Spirit within you and you will be saved from the eternal fires of hell that were created for the devil and his fallen angels. Believe in the Lord Jesus and he will welcome you into his heavenly kingdom for ever, but if you reject him, then you will be condemned to the torments of hell forever. Which will you chose?

That is the gospel. And if you believe it, then you will enjoy sweet communion with God the Father, his Holy Son, and his Holy Spirit forever. This is what Jesus has commanded all his disciples to preach and teach. Hear this information. Respond in faith to this true information. This is the word of Christ.

There's one final aspect to the ministry of Jesus and that is his **healing** power. The truth of this gospel message is manifested by the power it contains. Jesus healed every disease and every affliction. He healed the sick and the afflicted. He took away pain and delivered those who were oppressed by demons. He took away seizures and gave strong legs to paralytics. He healed them and delivered them to demonstrate that He truly is the Son of God. This kind of healing power is characteristic of the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is still doing this kind of work today. He still heals. He still delivers. He still restores. I've seen Him do it. I've seen Him physical illness. I've seen him deliver from demonic oppression. I've seen Him soothe pain and take away affliction and give strength.

Why don't we see more of it?

Part of the answer is because we don't believe he can do these things, so we don't ask him to. Apparently part of the reason that Jesus left his home town of Nazareth was because they refused to believe in him (Mt. 13:58; Mk. 6:5). Jesus taught in his hometown synagogue and at first everyone was amazed at his word and his work (Mt. 13:54). But then they got offended at him because he was one of them and yet he possessed great wisdom and works, and so they refused to go to him for healing. We

are told that “he did not do many mighty works there”¹⁹ because they did not believe in him and so they did not go to him. There were only a few people who believed in him so only a few people were healed (Mk. 6:5).

Another part of the answer is that the curse has not yet been fully lifted. The kingdom of heaven has broken into this world, but it has not yet come in all its fullness, therefore we all still struggle with the pain and brokenness of abiding under the curse. The curse will not be fully lifted until Jesus returns in power and great glory. Then, the curse will be completely reversed. It has begun to be reversed, but that reversal is not yet complete.

Crowds of people came to Jesus in Galilee of the Gentiles from the Decapolis (the majority Gentile region to the east), from Jerusalem (about 85 miles), from Judea (which was the region further south of Jerusalem), and from beyond the Jordan. Will you come to him today?

Conclusion

Jesus moves to minister with purpose and fulfills God’s prophetic word.

Jesus calls with clarity saying, “Follow me.” Because Jesus fulfills prophecy, he is worthy to be followed. Will you follow him?

Jesus ministers with authority. He preaches, teaches, and heals with authority. Will you respond to his preaching? Will you believe his teaching? Will you come to him for healing, forgiveness, and restoration?

¹⁹ Matthew 13:58.

Appendix:

Fulfillment in Matthew

From Matthew chapters one through four.

1. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Gn. 12:3) as "son of Abraham" (1:1).
2. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to David (2 Sam. 7:14) as "son of David" (1:1).
3. Jesus is the fulfillment of what God spoke through Isaiah, "that a virgin will conceive and bear a son" (Is. 7:14; Mt. 1:22).
4. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise that messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2; Mt. 2:1).
5. Jesus is the fulfillment of what God spoke through Hosea saying "out of Egypt I called my Son" (Hos. 11:1; Mt. 2:14-15).
6. Herod's killing of Bethlehem baby boys is fulfillment of "Rachel weeping for her children," which was spoken by Jeremiah (31:15; Mt. 2:16-18).
7. Jesus fulfilled the notion proclaim by multiple prophets that messiah would be despised (i.e. He shall be called a Nazarene, Mt. 2:23).
8. John fulfilled God's promise, spoken through Isaiah and Malachi, that a "messenger in the wilderness" (Is. 40:3) would be before messiah "preparing the way" (Mal. 3:1; Mt. 3:3).
9. At Jesus' baptism God declared him to be his "beloved Son" in fulfillment of that which was spoken by the prophet David (Mt. 3:17; Ps. 2:7; Heb. 1:5a; cf. Heb. 1:5b; 2 Sam. 7:14).
10. At Jesus' baptism God declared him to be a "Son with whom I am well pleased" in fulfillment of that which was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah (42:1; Mt. 3:17).
11. The fact that Jesus began his ministry in Galilee is fulfillment of what God spoke through Isaiah (9:1-2; Mt. 4:12-16).