

Text: Matthew 4:12-25

Title: Jesus Begins

Truth: The public ministry of Jesus commences.

Date/Location: Wednesday March 3, 2021 and March 14, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

Recall that the outline of Matthew 4 is as follows:

1. Jesus passes test of the wilderness temptation, 4:1-11
2. Jesus moves to Capernaum in Galilee, 4:12-16
3. Jesus preaches repentance and calls disciples, 4:17-25

We have addressed #1 in the previous notes. Now, on to the second and third parts.

I. Capernaum in Galilee, 4:12-16

- A. Some time passes, perhaps a few months, and John is put into prison. Some more time passed. Jesus left Nazareth at that time and moved into Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee (Sea of Tiberias). This would be his home base for the time being, if you could say he had a home (Luke 9:58). He had already ministered there by this time.
- B. The region where he lived was the historical homeland of the Israelite tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. "Galilee of the Gentiles" refers to the region as the passageway for Gentiles into and out of the nation of Israel. So both the people of the two tribes and those passing through (the Gentiles) had a new light available to them which was never present before. The quotation is from Isaiah 9:1-2. Another important passage is Isaiah 42:6-7. This light was just the early rays of dawn that will more fully come to light in the future kingdom.

II. Jesus Preaches Repentance, 4:17

Although my outline has this verse as part of the following section, I believe it is worthy to call out in some detail.

- A. This is undoubtedly a summary that gives the essence of Jesus's message. He certainly said more than these words, as we see from

the upcoming Sermon on the Mount and throughout the gospels. He had a lot to say with particular application to the people and time in which He was ministering.

- B. Notice that Jesus preached the same message as John the Baptist. Look carefully at Matt. 3:2—“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” And then compare with 4:17—“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
- C. The words are the same in both cases. Jesus preached what John preached. Or, saying it in reverse, John preached the same thing that Jesus preached. Jesus was not asking John to preach a different message, but rather to preach the exact same thing that he did. Today, we too are told to preach the exact same message that Jesus preached. We preach the gospel of Christ, and Christ would, if He were here, preach the same good news.
- D. God’s part in the message is that He is bringing the Kingdom.
- E. Mankind’s part in this message is to repent. This means to turn from sin and be converted to Jesus Christ. It is a change of mind about sin—from loving it to hating it; from wanting it to despising it; from taking it lightly to taking it seriously; from not knowing what it is or why it is significant to realizing how deadly it is.

But repentance also means turning *to* God. It means desiring God, loving God, expressing thanksgiving to God, and really believing in God. It means also turning to Jesus Christ. Christianity is CHRISTianity for a reason, because it focuses on Jesus CHRIST. You cannot have a warm and fuzzy conception of “God” and be saved. God’s salvation is only through Jesus Christ.

- F. Repentance is not regret. Repentance is not remorse. Those feelings—regret and remorse—will likely accompany true repentance, but they are not the same thing as it, because you can have those feelings with zero connection to God and Christ.

III. Jesus Calls His Disciples and Heals Many, 4:18-25

- A. Calling of Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, 4:18-22. From what we know of the whole timeline of events, Jesus had met these men

before the events recorded here. Thus, it was not a “cold call” that Jesus made to these men. See John 1:40-41.

1. He invited (commanded) them to come with Him. He promised that He would change their occupation from fishermen to fishers OF men. They would minister to people now instead of kill fish. They were immediately obedient. The appropriate preparations had already been made in their hearts to follow Christ. God had worked, and these men had considered their ways.
2. Peter and Andrew left their nets—meaning they left behind their property and the tools of their profession—in order to follow Christ. To one extend or another, a call to vocational ministry means that you will be leaving behind other things that you could have done or might like to have done. Even things that are not wrong to do—like making an honest living by being a fisherman—sometimes have to be left behind. For a minister of the gospel who is not or cannot be bi-vocational, this is especially true.

I can give a small personal illustration of that, but it is nothing compared to what these men did. This reminds me of the broader principle that when we become Christians—not just ministers—we do leave behind things. What exactly have you left behind, or still need to leave behind?

3. James and John reacted similarly to Peter and Andrew. The text says that they left the boat *and their father*. That is quite a change of career in one fell swoop. I would like to hope that their father was encouraging them in this move, but we do not know at this point. Even if so, he was undoubtedly sad to see his sons and partners in the family business move into another field. They would learn later that if you have left houses or lands or fathers, you will receive way more in reward in the future (Mark 10:29-30, context 10:23-31).
4. Jesus now has four of the disciples/apostles with eight more to go. See Matthew 9:9 for Matthew’s calling. All of them are named in the early verses of Matthew 10. See also John 1:43-51.

B. The ministry of Jesus, 4:23-25, consisted of three things:

1. **Traveling** initially around Galilee, and then beyond to Decapolis and the rest of Israel. The travel served the need to see and be with people.
2. **Teaching** and preaching in the synagogues (a place of assembly, but later, the people, not the building). Synagogues would have been found dotting the landscape because the distance to walk to one could not be difficult for the members. One was in Nazareth (Matt. 13:54) and one in Capernaum (Mark 1:21). Synagogues had floor seating, and “chief seat” seating (Matt. 23:6). One source suggested that there were as many as 50 synagogues in the Galilee region—one of the densest centers of synagogues anywhere in the world at the time because it was the center hub of the Jewish religion. Depending on location, they could be quite small or have many members. I suspect their turnout as a percentage of population was a bit higher than that of Christian churches in today’s western secular society.

“Local elders governed the synagogue, a kind of democracy. While all adult members of the community could belong to the synagogue, only adult males age 13 or older could be elders. A local caretaker (unfortunately sometimes called "ruler" in the English Bible), called the hazzan, was responsible for maintaining the building and organizing the prayer services (Mark 5:22, 35-36, 38; Luke 8:41-49, 13:14). The hazzan was sometimes the teacher of the synagogue school, especially in smaller villages. He would announce the coming Sabbath with blasts on the shofar (ram's horn). Although the hazzan was in charge of worship services, the prayer leader, readers, and even the one who delivered the short sermon could be any adult member of the community. All were recognized as being able to share the meaning of God's Word as God had taught them in their daily walk with him. In this way, the community encouraged even its youngest members to be active participants in its religious life. (Jesus' encounter with the wise teachers in the Temple courts was unusual not so much because of his age, but because of the wise questions he asked, see Luke

2:41-47.) The hazzan also cared for the Torah scrolls and other sacred writings and brought them out at the appropriate times (Luke 4:1-20). Priests and Levites were welcome to participate in synagogue life, including worship, but they had no special role except that only priests could offer the blessing of Aaron from the Torah (Num. 6:24-27) at the end of the service.”¹

“Boys and girls went to school in Galilee though boys continued till they were 15 if they displayed unusual ability while the girls were married by that time. Students probably attended school in the synagogue and were taught by the hazzan or a local Torah Teacher. Study began at age five or six in elementary school, called *bet sefer*. The subject was the Torah and the method was memorization. Since the learning of the community was passed orally, memorization of tradition and God's Word were essential.”²

What He taught was the gospel of the kingdom—that is, the good news that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and if you repent, you can participate. This is where confusion begins in the modern church. Notice that it does not say Jesus preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Himself. He did later express those things to the disciples. But he did not preach the church. He preached the Kingdom.

While we preach the same *saving* message and the need for repentance, we do not preach that we are in the kingdom or even that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. We are in the church, and we proclaim that the kingdom is (still) coming. It is a bit of a distance off yet, given the Tribulation must unfold first.

3. **Healing** the sick. This miraculous activity served to authenticate Jesus as a prophet of God—more than a prophet in fact—and also to raise His profile in the surrounding regions of Syria. This drew large crowds of people who wanted to be healed. What they really needed was spiritual healing, but the physical healing did serve to bring them into contact with Jesus’s teaching.

¹ <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/he-went-to-synagogue>

² *Ibid.*

4. This healing did a third thing, and that is to connect Jesus to the kingdom promises of the Old Testament. Consider for example Isaiah 35:5-6a regarding the healing of human afflictions. Following in 35:6b-7 we read of the healing of nature's afflictions. He was giving a preview of what would occur in the kingdom with his appearing. The unbelief of the people cut off the inauguration of the kingdom (Matt. 13:58). We need not answer the question "What would have happened if they would have accepted it," because they did not accept it.
5. Note that this healing is miraculous, unlike that which done in hospitals or dental clinics through normal means, as good providences as those things are. As needful as hospitals are, today they are benevolence work, they are *not* healing like Jesus did it.
6. Some weeks back we had a question in one of our Q&A sessions about this matter of miraculous healings. The gift of healing is certainly obsoleted and not given today because it would serve no authenticating purpose, and God has told us that the partial is set aside, and that the foundation of the church is set. I cannot categorically say that direct divine healings do *not* occur today on the basis of the Biblical text, but I cannot prove that they do occur either. They certainly *could* happen if the divine power of God is the only issue, but several issues weigh against counting on miracles in sickness.

First, the purpose of the miracles given above was to authenticate the ministry of the One who did the healing. Private or "obscure" healings today have nothing to do with that.

Second, the miracles connected His coming to the coming of the Kingdom. These purposes are not at play in the healing of an individual today.

Third, miracles are very rare events, saving for the miracle of regeneration, which is still rare by comparison to the mass of humanity on the broad way. Only during a few seasons in the past 6,000 years were miracles even somewhat commonplace.

Think of those seasons in your mind and God's representatives who were active in them.

Fourth, if a healing miracle occurred, we would not know it unless God told us, because there is no one around to confirm or verify what happened. We may chalk it up to a providential turn of events, good doctoring, a stronger immune system, a "miracle" drug, or the like.

Fifth, Biblical miracles are typically quite spectacular. At least to the observers, however few or many they may be, the miracle is stupendous and cannot be explained by natural means. The widow's oil, for instance, had only a few observers (2 Kings 4:1-7). The crossing of the Red Sea had thousands; the observers of the risen Christ numbered in the hundreds. Of course, doubters abounded in the NT era, in ancient Egypt, as they do today. No amount of persuasion could convince them that any of these things were an act of God. This is a little ironic in that today's insurance industry will call a lightning strike or a tornado an act of God! Today we fancy ourselves far wiser than those of old and may think that there are naturalistic explanations for many or all of the events that are called miracles.

For these five reasons, I would not recommend praying for a miracle. Pray for healing—if you believe it to be God's will—but do not ask God to do it by one method or another. It may be His will that you come through the trial like Job—without a miracle, but with a long period of physical suffering.

Over the years I have become less enthusiastic about praying for healing. I have seen many a case where it does not occur, and it is my estimation that it is often God's will *not* to heal someone of, say, a terminal disease—principally because He is bringing them to the end of their earthly sojourn. That is, after all, what the end of all mankind is. To pray against that, by asking for a miracle or other healing regardless of the will of God, is unwise. More important is to pray for grace—the grace of salvation or the grace of comfort in the midst of illness and death.

So, even if God does perform "stealth" healing miracles in this age, however frequent, I would *not* advocate praying a miracle

as such. Inquire of the Lord to heal by whatever means He deems appropriate, or none at all if that is His will. And make use of the medical means that God has made available to you. When those means run out, thank Him for what He has provided in life.

Lest this discourage you entirely and you begin to flag in your prayer for those who are sick, remember this: going only to the physicians and leaving God out of the equation displeases the Lord (2 Chron. 16:12). Do not stop praying. Just because miracles may not happen does not mean God does not permit healing to occur through other means.

C. Notice finally the crowds (v. 25) that came to Jesus were an ancient near east phenom. This did not happen all the time. There were other charismatic leaders who drew crowds after themselves (Acts 21:38 for example). But none had the healing power, and none had the message of Jesus which had a worldwide, history-changing effect.

Conclusion

We have learned about Jesus as light, as preacher of repentance, as one who calls people to minister for Him, and as a healer and preacher of the kingdom of God.

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