



The Ministry of the King

Series: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Matthew 4:12–25

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You remember that when we first began this series in the gospel of Matthew, we said that in his gospel, Matthew will present Jesus as the Messiah King, the Savior King, who is revealed to be the Son of God in His birth, to be the rightful King – the Son of David -- over Israel by His lineage, and the One who would bless the nations as the True Seed – the Son of Abraham. Throughout this book the goal of Matthew is that we would behold the eternal majesty and kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ and we will see the ministry of the King begin in earnest today.

1) The Brightness of the King (v. 12-17) When we come to this text, roughly a year has passed between the temptation/testing of Christ and the ministry that Matthew records for us here. Theologians speak of three phases to Christ's ministry – the year of obscurity, which is described for us in John 1-4, the commencement of public ministry and the year of growing popularity, and last, the year of increasing opposition. Matthew skips over the year of obscurity and picks up with the beginning of Christ's public ministry immediately after John the Baptist had been put in jail by Herod. Herod put him in jail because John was not afraid to call out Herod Antipas for his sinful relationship with his own brother's wife. (Matthew 14:3–4, ESV) Herod had begun an adulterous relationship with his brother's wife. Because both of them were married at the time, they divorced their spouses without cause and married one another. John was not afraid to speak the truth, regardless of the cost. So John was put in jail, effectively ending his ministry of pointing to the Christ and on the heels of his arrest, Jesus public ministry began to flourish.

Seeking to avoid a premature confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees that had dogged John's ministry, guys who were well aware of close association with John and probably even the rumor regarding His Messiah-ship, Jesus withdrew into Galilee and establishing his base of operations for the time-being in Capernaum.

Capernaum was located on the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Galilee, an area that Matthew refers to as Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali. Capernaum, in Jesus day, was prosperous city. It was along an important trade route called "the way of the sea" which stretched from Damascus to the Mediterranean coast and then down into Egypt.

Gentile influence due to the trade route was strong and constant. Though outwardly and materially prosperous in Jesus' time, the region had a tumultuous history. The Lord had originally given this region of Galilee to the tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali when Israel began to settle in the Promised Land during the conquest of Joshua. But they failed to follow the command of God to expel all of the Canaanites from their territories and as a result, they endured the troubles of mixed marriage and the pagan religious influences that were the result. In the 8th century BC, the Assyrians under the leadership of Tiglath-pileser took much of the tribes captive and replaced them with Assyrians and other non-Jews who further weakened the spiritual condition of the region. Around 104 BC, the Jewish leader Aristobulus re-conquered Galilee and tried to compel all the people who lived there to be Jews by forcibly circumcising all of the male inhabitants. You can imagine how that went. So by the time of Jesus, this region had become spiritually darkened and dead. Truth was in short supply and pagan influences were rampant -- idolatry, foreign philosophies and religions -- it is there that Christ would shine brightly.

All this, Mathew says, was in keeping with the prophet Isaiah. He quotes from Isaiah 9:1-2 which says: (Isaiah 9:1-2, ESV) The region that was disciplined by God, that was the first to taste the discipline of God for their idolatry and spiritual adultery would also be the first to behold the Messiah. The great light of God's Messiah, of God's truth, of the proclamation of the kingdom of God would come to the Galileans. The first to hear the wisdom and behold the power of the Messiah would not be the proud, pureblooded, self-righteous and self-important spiritual leaders and rulers of Jerusalem, but the outcast, the downcast of Galilee of the Gentiles. Into this land, much like our own, a land of spiritual confusion, dominated by the darkness of pagan religion, filled with the death of sin -- that is the meaning of the phrase, the region and shadow of death -- into this morally and spiritually corrupt land, the Messiah has come. Into this region of delusion, despondency, and depravity came the light of the world. It is fitting that Jesus would begin His ministry there because, in truth, Capernaum is a picture of the condition of all of us prior to the dawning of Christ on our hearts. The condition of Galilee of the Gentiles is the condition of every human heart minus the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ -- steeped in sin, ignorant of truth, darkened in understanding, depraved and unable to save themselves, the dominion of Satan and the mastery of sin, blind to our true spiritual condition, blind to the danger in which we are living, blind to the precarious position our souls is in apart from Christ, blind to our wickedness, blind to our need, blinded by Satan. Galilee of the Gentiles, the melting pot of Jews and gentiles is a picture of every human heart, of all human societies apart from the light of Christ and the gospel.

But Jesus Christ, by His presence, by His preaching, by His acts of mercy and grace, by His works of power, would fill the hearts of those who would become His followers with the joy and the light of salvation. Paul describes it like this: (2 Corinthians 4:6, ESV) Jesus said in John 12:46:

(John 12:46, ESV) Christ came to give the light of life to all who would believe in Him. It is not that all who saw Christ or who heard Him preach, it is not that all who were spiritually darkened were delivered from the shadow of death, but as it pleased God, He opened the their sin darkened minds, and ours as well, to the Light of the World who is Christ. God has done this.

All men are in darkness apart from the gracious work of God to open blinded eyes, which makes it seem strange Christ's ministry would be focused and based in Capernaum and not Jerusalem, not among the religious teachers and the spiritually influential, the educated and elite, the influential and powerful, but here again we see the heart of Jesus for the common people. Here we see Jesus not calling the self-righteous, but sinners to repentance. We see the grace of Christ to call the weak, the broken, the depraved to faith and life and light. Is that not the pattern of the gospel throughout history? Paul says: (1 Corinthians 1:26–31, ESV) Of course, Christ's public ministry would find its start in a place like Samaria and Galilee, among the lowly and despised. Spurgeon says of this: The "real light" encountered the great darkness; the far-off ones were visited by him who gathers together the outcasts of Israel. Our Lord courts not those who glory their light, but those who pine in their darkness: he comes with heavenly life, not to those who boast of their own life and energy, but to those who are under condemnation, and who feel the shades of death shutting them out from light and hope. The issue is the same today just as it was over 2000 years ago. Men and women are in spiritual darkness and blindness, unable to see, to understand and to know God and the light of Christ and of His gospel must dawn upon their hearts so that they may be saved. Light must shine in the darkness.

As Isaiah had prophesied 800 years earlier, the despised, sin darkened and sinful Galileans were the first to behold the Messiah and to hear His message, a message that sounded quite similar to the message of John. 17From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Though the message is the same -- Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand -- the implications are something else entirely. John called people to repentance because the kingdom of heaven was coming, was imminent in the appearance of the Messiah who was coming, but Jesus was calling them to repentance because the kingdom was now here in Him. Now these words, -- Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand -- are not the only words that Christ spoke but these words represent the very heart of Christ's message.

In His preaching, after dismantling false righteousness, after exposing the errors of false religion, after exposing the wickedness of sin and darkness of the human heart, Jesus offered Himself and His reign and His rule as the hope for all sinners. He called men and women to repentance, to turn away from their sin and vain hopes and turn to Him, not in light of a kingdom that was fast approaching, but in the light of the Kingdom of God that was already

here in Christ. With a clear view of His crucifixion, His resurrection, His ascension, and Pentecost to come he could offer Himself as the King of the Kingdom of heaven. So Jesus calls men and women to repent, men and women who are condemned by their sins, who are at enmity with God, who are under the dominion of Satan, who are in desperate need of Christ and of His saving work. These Christ calls to come to Him, to the king, to trust in Him now and in all that He would do on their behalf and the glorious result would not merely be the escape of judgment, but undeserved blessing poured upon you as you live now as a citizen in the Kingdom of heaven – under God’s rule, His sovereignty embraced in your hearts and lives. It is blessing untold, the joy of salvation, the promise of God’s care, an intimate knowing of God in Christ so that we can cry out: (Psalm 18:1–3,; Psalm 27:1; Psalm 40:2–4, 11; Psalm 73:22–28, ESV) Such is the blessing of life in the Kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of Christ’s reign, hidden for now but to be fully revealed at His coming. This is what Christ offered. The kingdom of heaven has come, the reign of Christ has come and in that we see the

2) The Boldness of the King (v.18-22) According to John’s gospel, Jesus was already acquainted with some of the men that Matthew refers to here. Andrew had been a disciple of JTB and was one of the two men that followed Jesus when John had identified Him as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) John also describes how Andrew brought his brother, Peter, to Jesus. So at least, Jesus already knew Andrew and Peter before this account by Matthew, so what is going on here? Considering the context Matthew is referring, it seems, to a further specific call, a call to leave everything and to begin to follow Jesus as His disciple, as His learner. These men would eventually becoming apostles, one who would both learn and preach the gospel of the kingdom, uniquely chosen by Christ to declare the gospel throughout the world. We see that foreshadowed in Christ’s words: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

This is a bold call by Christ – their effectual call to discipleship, to submit to and to commit to Christ as king -- a call for decision, a call demanding a response. The question, of course, is what does it mean for Jesus to say “Follow Me”? This phrase will show up repeatedly in the gospels, directed to those Christ would call eventually to the place of apostleship as well as to those whom He called to follow him as disciples -- the place to which all true Christians are called. Discipleship is at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian. It is not a call to simply believe a certain set of facts, to simply hear the message of Christ, but to follow Him. This is personal. It was a call to relationship, to know Christ as Master and Lord, to learn of Him, to receive what He taught, to follow His life, to receive His admonition and instruction, to put off sin and embrace the pursuit of Christ’s holiness. But even more, following Christ is the call to desire Him more than any earthly treasure, it is to see Him as that pearl of great price for whom you would give everything just to have him. It is to see him as the hidden treasure that you would sell everything to have. That is what following him means. Certainly we will talk

more about the depth of discipleship when we get to Matthew 10 and 16, but I want us to think about the nature of discipleship. What are the characteristics of true disciples of Christ?

1. Repentance and faith – To be a disciple of Christ means that we must turn away from self-styled plans of salvation and our own philosophy of religion to embrace salvation by faith alone in the work of Christ on the cross. Certainly at the moment that Christ called them the disciples did not understand the cross and Christ’s substitutionary work of salvation on the cross for sinners – that would be revealed to them over time but they had to turn away from their old lives to embrace all that Christ is. By contrast, we on this side of the cross certainly must understand and embrace the gospel, turning from sin and trusting in Christ for salvation. But the fundamental truth is this that to be a disciple of Christ requires that we renounce sin and pursue Jesus Christ by faith and that becomes the pattern of our lives.

2. Submission and love – Later in this very same gospel, Jesus will describe discipleship in this way: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” ” (Matthew 11:29–30, ESV) That is a picture worth a thousand words, but primarily it is about submission and being placed under the authority of another. If Christ is truly King and Lord, how could it be otherwise? Notice that in both of these cases, immediately Peter and Andrew left their nets, immediately James and John left their boat and left their father – Christ must be their greatest allegiance and their highest love on this earth. Jesus did not call for good intentions. It was not merely a desire to follow that Jesus called for but to actually follow Him as your supreme allegiance – above even family.

3. Obedience – The words “follow me” are a command, an order from Christ, if you will. Without obedience there is no real Christianity, a concept that will be richly taught throughout this letter. Jesus said of His church, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27, ESV) There is the recognition that Jesus is rightfully Lord and Master and the response of obedience that follows. (Matthew 7:24–28, ESV) The key issue of discipleship is receiving the Word of God, hearing the Word of God, being instructed by the Word of God, and by faith and by grace building our lives on the Word of God and so doing the will of the Father who is in heaven.

4. Trust – At the very heart of discipleship must be trust. It is impossible to follow Christ without trusting Him, trusting His heart, trusting His word to us. A lack of trust will lead to self-reliance, self-idolatry – reliance on our own wisdom and on our own strength – or idolatry – a trust in something or someone else above Christ – and a lack of trust will inevitable lead to a lack of obedience.

5. Faithful endurance – In other words, following Christ is not an isolated act, done once and for all and never to be repeated. On the contrary, following Christ is a faithful pursuit of Christ, a lifetime commitment that is not complete until the race is won, the crown is received and our rewards are laid at his feet. Discipleship is proven by following Christ to the end.

Do you see it, beloved? The sovereignty of the Messiah-King is clear in this call. He must have primacy in the lives of those who would be His disciples. It has often been

said that God's grace is free, but it costs those who receive it everything and that is true. God's grace is absolutely free. We can do nothing to earn our salvation; we cannot make God owe to us salvation. We are alienated from God, debtors to Him. We are dead in sin and have nothing to offer to God. Even our best works condemn us. There is nothing that we can do to save ourselves...but God chooses to save us; He sends His Son to fulfill all the law on our behalf and though sinless and perfect, to die a sinner's death on the cross, in our place, extinguishing the wrath of God that was against us and paying the full penalty of our sin. The Father draws us, Christ calls us, the Spirit makes our dead souls live and gives to us the faith to trust Christ as our Savior and Lord – God must do the work of salvation. But salvation is also a call to discipleship and in that sense His free grace costs us everything – we are not longer our own; we are bought with a price, we must glorify the Lord and bow our knee to Him alone.

Speaking specifically of Peter, Andrew, James and John -- leaving their fishing nets, they would become fishers of men. You see, with the call of Christ comes the creative and powerful work of Christ in our lives. It is no idle call but a call to following him that leads to an entirely different life – fishing after men. Christ called these men and as they followed Him, He would change these men by His word and by His Spirit and make them the foundation of His church, the apostles, the ones who would serve His people and pass to them His teaching and preach to them His gospel and share in the power of the Holy Spirit. He would make of them men who would be gatherers, fishers of men – pursuing men and women for the Kingdom of God. It is a call that leads to following after Christ in

3) The Mission of the King (v.23-25) How would these men learn how to pursue and gather men and women for the kingdom of God? They would behold the ministry and the mission of Christ as it unfolded. Here, Matthew gives to us a very clear picture of the mission and the ministry of the King and it is a mission composed of three parts – Preaching, teaching, and healing. And in these words we see the character of the ministry of Christ clearly revealed. We see His methodology, which was not terribly complex. His ministry was a ministry of truth in word and in deed.

First, as in verse 17, let me draw your attention to the fact that Jesus came preaching. He came declaring, he came proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. This would characterize Christ's ministry from beginning to end. Jesus regularly astonished the crowds with his preaching and his teaching because he did so as one who had authority, and not as their scribes." (Matthew 7:29, ESV) The preaching of Christ came as such a surprise because it was authoritative and it came with power because he preached what he was commissioned by the Father to preach. John the Baptist testified of Jesus: (John 3:34, ESV) Jesus said of Himself in John 12:49: (John 12:49, ESV)

Jesus was bold, uncompromising and faithful in His preaching of the coming of the Kingdom. His purpose in His preaching was not only to impart truth, not only to move the hearts, but His purpose was to urge men and women to submit themselves to Him, to embrace the gospel, to embrace His rule in their lives, to repent of sin and trust in him. His preaching called for a response. It did not allow for neutrality.

Second, Matthew tells us that Christ was teaching in their synagogues. The word for teaching is the word that means to carefully and systematically instruct in the truths of God's word. It includes comparing Scripture with Scripture, building precept upon precept and applying the Word of God to life. It is a process, an ongoing process, of bringing light into darkness, of dismantling empty religious traditions, replacing them with truth and renewing minds that were once ignorant of God's wisdom. For Jesus, it included rooting His message in the OT and showing how His message and ministry was the fulfillment of the law and of the prophets and flowed from the covenant promises made to Abraham, to Moses, and to David.

Last, we see that Jesus went about healing every disease and every affliction among the people. In a great display of His divine power and glory, Jesus, powerfully destroyed the physical effects of sin – various diseases and pains, epilepsy, those who were paralyzed, even those who were demon oppressed those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics. This healing ministry of Christ served the purpose of demonstrating to the nation Israel that Christ is the Messiah, fulfilling the words that Isaiah wrote in chapter 35 (Isaiah 35:4–6, ESV)

When Jesus Christ appeared in Israel preaching the message of repentance and announcing that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, the confirmation He offered that He was the Messiah was that He would take away the diseases of the people. But even more, he was demonstrating his ultimate conquering power of sin. Sickness was a symptom of a greater evil: the depravity of the human heart and power of sin. His many acts of healing gave clear and powerful demonstration of the greater work that he would accomplish at the cross, in dealing the deathblow to sin in all of its wicked effects.

Notice also the universal character of these healings. Jesus heals in Galilee, a place where Jews and Gentiles were mixed and people come to Him to be healed from Syria, from Decapolis, from Jerusalem, from Judea and from across the Jordan. People from all over come to Christ to be healed.

Not only do we see here a concise and clear picture of the ministry of Christ, it offers to us a pattern for the way in which we must do ministry in the kingdom of God.

The preaching and the teaching of word of God must be the centerpiece of what we do as the people of God. It is the word of God that brings life. The church's role is not to advertise itself, and magnify itself, and show itself off, but to advertise and display the truth. The church has a responsibility to keep as a sacred treasure biblical doctrine. She must not modify, ignore, corrupt, add to or detract from the authoritative, unchanging doctrine of Scripture but to preach it and teach it boldly and faithfully.

And just as Jesus dealt with the temporal effects of sin, so are we to give ourselves, our resources, and abilities, our strength to alleviate the effects of sin as we can. That has always been the result of Christianity in places where the truth of God has been embraced.

Everywhere the gospel of Jesus Christ has gone, everywhere this saving message reigns, human misery has been dealt with in remarkable ways -- educational institutions, hospitals, sanitation, agricultural training and food distribution, orphanages, adoptions -- all a result of the gospel applied. Jesus is that perfect example of the marriage of ministry in word and deed. It must be both.

What are we to take away from these words?

Has the Light dawned upon you? If so, then walk as children of Light (Eph 5:8). If not, then plead for the grace to know the Light of Jesus Christ through the gospel.

Have you heard his voice through the gospel and answered gladly his call? Are you following him? Does your life bear the marks of true discipleship? Repentance and faith, submission, obedience, trust and faithful endurance. Discipleship is at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian.

Are you faithfully involved in the mission of the Kingdom of heaven?

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