

Response to the Kingdom

King of Heaven: The (Un)expected King

Matthew 4:12-25

Pastor Lucas McGarity

January 10, 2021

Good morning church. I want to start of our time this morning with a question. Have you ever seen something new and you couldn't take your eyes off of it? Or have you received something new and you just couldn't wait to use it or try it out?

These can be all sorts of things. I'm sure that many of you were watching the events unfold at the Capitol on Wednesday afternoon and you just couldn't look away. I learned about it happening after our Restart Task Force meeting as Judy was giving us play-by-play updates from Twitter. We all listened in disbelief but nobody made a move to leave the room because we were sucked in by this new event. I remember this being the case for me when I was in high school with 9/11, and many of you may have been like this when JFK was assassinated.

But it doesn't have to be some intense event that draws our attention like this. A new Christmas present can suck us in just as much. If you are in middle school or high school you probably know someone who got a new video game and then you didn't see them for a while because they got sucked into the game so much they abandoned all contact with the outside world. One of these gifts for me was new Dive Bomb goose decoys. Christy bought some of these for me and I just couldn't wait to use them. I was sucked in and my mind quickly transported me to a winter wheat field with the sun just coming up. When I got them I wanted the season to begin right then in the middle of July.

Our passage in Matthew 4 this morning records something new happening in the Gospel of Matthew. The events before this were all about Jesus' resolute focus on the mission. He willingly submitted to the plan of the Father. We see this in his baptism and also in his temptation. He was not willing to cut any corners but would willingly accomplish the mission no matter what it took. In the second half of chapter 4 there is a change. Jesus is no longer showing his submission to the mission but he begins to move and acts to carry it out. Things start to happen and people respond to it in droves. They couldn't take their eyes off of this new thing that was happening and they came from far and wide to see it.

Will you please open your Bibles to Matthew 4:12-25 and stand for the reading of God's Word.

Matthew 4:12–25¹

¹²Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴so 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—
¹⁶the people dwelling in darkness
have seen a great light,*

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

*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.”*

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. ¹⁹And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹And 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. ²²Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*

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. ²⁴So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. ²⁵And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.*

This is the Word of the Lord.

We are going to divide our time this morning into three parts as we look at this new thing that has arrived. That thing is the kingdom of heaven. We will see how it comes near, who it has come to, and the response to it.

THE KINGDOM HAS COME NEAR.

The new thing that has come onto the scene in Matthew is the kingdom of heaven coming near, it is at hand. In verse 12 we see Jesus making a large geographic move. He hears that John the Baptist is arrested by King Herod and then he withdraws to Galilee. A reading of the other gospels shows us that there is a time gap between verses 11 and 12 of up to a year. The Gospel of John records events that Jesus did during this time but I want us to spend our time focusing on the purpose of Matthew’s gospel. Jesus may have left southern Israel, Jerusalem, and Judea because of Herod and the arrest of John the Baptist, but it was also for another purpose. John the Baptist’s imprisonment signaled the end of his ministry and the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus’ ministry would begin in Galilee. Matthew records Jesus leaving Nazareth and moving to Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. Jesus does this to fulfill what Isaiah spoke in Isaiah 9:1-2. Matthew quotes this in verses 15-16. Matthew says it is Galilee of the Gentiles. Galilee was full of great spiritual darkness. It was a place of great spiritual need. Those who dwelled there were in darkness and lived in the shadow of death. They had no hope of salvation.

There are times in life when we know we are in desperate need of help. When I was a kid I used to watch a show called *Rescue 911*. It was about emergency workers as they went to help people in need. The people they went to help could not help themselves and they knew it. That’s why they dialed 911, or someone dialed 911 for them. They needed another to come to their aid. As they heard the sirens in the distance getting louder and louder and they saw the lights, they had hope that they would be ok. Someone was coming to intervene in their situation. They were coming to save them.

It was in dark Galilee and with these people who were in desperate need where the light dawned. Light is a symbol of hope and victory. It was in this context that the kingdom of heaven was at hand and came near. Jesus brings something new to the lives of the people in Galilee. His light and the

kingdom that he brought near shined so bright in contrast to the darkness. But what was this kingdom like? How did it function?

First, it didn't happen and function how the Jewish people, or any earthly kingdom, would. Matthew contrasts the kingdom of heaven with earthly kingdoms in his gospel. Jesus didn't say, "Repent, for the greatest kingdom ever to exist in the history of the earth is at hand." He said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." If this were an earthly kingdom we would expect it to start in a major place of cultural power or influence. In Israel that would have been in Jerusalem or Judea, but Jesus went to a semi-prosperous fishing town on the north side of the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum. The reason it is famous is because of Jesus, not anything else. It's like he left New York City or Washington D.C. or Chicago and settled in Manhattan, KS. I know Manhattan is a great place but the Little Apple doesn't have as much influence as the Big Apple.

The kingdom didn't come with political power and military might. Jesus didn't begin to assemble an army to do battle against Rome. He wasn't a military leader who was going to release the Jewish people from Rome's power and create a kingdom in Jerusalem. The kingdom of heaven started with the proclamation of a message, teaching, and healing. We see in verse 23 that the message was the gospel of the kingdom, or the good news of the kingdom. The kingdom of heaven may not have looked like a kingdom here on earth but it brought good news with it. This good news is one of salvation to those who are living in darkness and the shadow of death. It was good news for the people of Galilee but is the same good news for us today.

Those in Galilee didn't fully know what this good news was at this point, but they soon would. It is the news of Jesus' death on behalf of sinful people. He took the punishment that we deserve, bearing our shame, and satisfying God's just judgment on our sin. Jesus proclaimed this message with his words in Matthew 4 but he also began to show us the kingdom with his actions.

The kingdom of heaven coming near began to reverse the effects of sin that began in Genesis 3. It brought restoration to the world. It was healing broken and sinful people. Verse 23 says that he healed every disease and every affliction among the people as he taught and proclaimed the message. He healed the diseased, the pained, those oppressed by demons, the epileptics, and the paralytics. All of these conditions are caused by sin. These diseases and afflictions were not a part of God's good and perfect creation in Genesis 1 and 2. At the end of each day of creation we hear that it was good, and on the seventh day creation is said to be very good. The kingdom of heaven is good and perfect. Jesus is giving us a glimpse of what this will be like as he heals.

I want to be clear that the kingdom of heaven didn't stop here on earth when Jesus ascended into heaven. It didn't come with him and then leave with him. The kingdom of heaven is here now but it isn't all the way here. It is already but not yet. I'm sure some of you were thinking that in your head just then because we say it a lot. This is the truth. The kingdom of heaven is God's people in God's place under God's blessing and rule. Those who have repented of their sins and believed the gospel are God's people. God dwells within them, this is God's place, and God has given them the blessing of eternal life.

But not all people are God's people, not everyone has God's blessing, and we are positive that not everyone lives in submission to God's rule. But when Jesus returns, this will be the case. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Sin and death will be judged and ended. But that is not how it is right now. God's people are called to live in faithful obedience to the

kingdom. We will see more about what that looks like in the coming weeks as we look at the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7.

The kingdom has dawned and come near. But every good kingdom needs people. So, who has the kingdom come to?

WHO HAS THE KINGDOM COME TO?

In order to answer that question, we need to look at who was living in Galilee. And with that comes a little bit of geography. I really like geography. It explains why people live where they live and why they live the way that they live. If you have been in the Middle School Room while I am teaching you have probably seen me draw a map or nerd out in some way with geography. Well enough of that, let's get to it.

The Roman historian Josephus gave many reports of the huge number of people living in Galilee. He said that there were 204 villages, with none of them under fifteen thousand people.² This may have been an exaggeration but it shows us that there were lots of people in this fifty-by-twenty-five mile area. It was agriculturally prosperous with excellent land for crops and livestock. It was also located along the Via Maris, which was the major trade route from Syria to Egypt. There were always people traveling through the area as they conducted business. These people brought with them ideas and beliefs about God. It was a mixture of both Jewish and Gentile people. It was a place of sin and ungodliness. It was heavily influenced by Rome and the worship of pagan gods.

This is the context and the people that the kingdom of heaven came to. And as Jesus begins to travel through Galilee teaching in the synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing, more and more people begin to show up on the scene. Jesus' fame spreads in all directions as people hear his teaching and witness the healing. His fame spreads through the entire province of Syria. Great crowds, made up of people from far and wide, begin to follow him.

These crowds are made up of both Jew and Gentile people. The kingdom of heaven did not just come for a particular ethnic group of people. Jesus didn't come only for those who were religious. He came for everyone, all people, all of the nations of the earth. Jesus' ministry began in Galilee by going to all of the peoples of the earth and his ministry on earth ended in the same way. Matthew 28:16-20 says this: "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

God has always desired for all of the nations of the earth to worship him. The good news of Jesus Christ is for all of them. Verses 23-25 makes this very clear. Jesus healed every disease and every affliction among the people and all of the sick who were brought to him. The gospel is for both Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, men and women, young and old. There isn't one group that is more important or preferential than another.

The Jews thought that the Messiah was for them and them alone. But Jesus came for all people. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish

² Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*

but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16). Jesus came for the nations. He came for the people that look like you here in Wichita. But he also came for the people that look and act the exact opposite of you. Maybe those people are in your family, school, work, and neighborhood. I’m sure you can picture them in your mind right now.

Going further away from Wichita we need to remember that Jesus came for the nations all over the world. That is why we send out missionaries and we have the privilege to commission and send out a new missions partner this morning at the end of the service. Jesus came for the Pearl people. He came for the Kazaks. Jesus came for the Uyghur, Sylheti, Timorese, Bolivian, Japanese, and Hausa. Prayer is a powerful thing and I would encourage you to pray for these people groups. The Hausa are highlighted in the prayer section of the bulletin this week. I would encourage you to pray for them specifically. In your prayers please ask God to help them respond to the gospel with repentance and belief.

The kingdom is for all people but they must respond to it. The verses in the middle of our passage this morning model how all people should respond to Jesus.

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO THE KINGDOM?

Jesus is in Capernaum and walking along the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum is a fishing town so there would have been a number of boats and fisherman along the shoreline working. As Jesus walked he sees four people in particular: Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

These guys were four ordinary young men. They were following in the footsteps of their dads or others in the town. They were working to provide for themselves, or their families, by fishing in the sea. This was a blue-collar job then in the same way it is today. A job where you would shower after you finished working rather than before you went to work. There was nothing wrong with this job. It was the industry that made Capernaum prosperous. However, fisherman weren’t extremely influential people to choose to start a movement with. But the kingdom of God isn’t as concerned with who we are before we believe, but instead with our response to the message and call of God.

It can seem like an irrational decision for Peter, Andrew, James, and John to leave their work and families to follow Jesus. I don’t think that I would follow a man who I didn’t know who asked me to follow him. But the Bible isn’t an irrational book. It calls people to step out in faith but not to act rashly. These men knew Jesus before he called them. The Gospel of John records events that happened before this where they interacted with each other. And they also lived in the same town. This calling beside the Sea of Galilee was different than their other interactions. The call came with authority and their response was immediate.

Jesus is overflowing with authority. I mean he’s got it in spades. He has authority coming out of his ears. Colossians 1:15-16 says, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.”

He has authority over the authorities. In verses 23-25 he shows that he has authority over all sickness, disease, demons, and any sort of affliction that could harm a person. So when he walked up to Peter and Andrew and said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,” what more could they do but follow?

Jesus chose them, they did not choose him. First-century rabbis didn't work this way. A prospective student would ask to follow a rabbi and, if allowed, would begin to follow him. But Jesus working in this opposite way shows us something. The disciples could have followed Jesus before. After all, they knew him. The disciples didn't choose Jesus, they needed God's help to do so.

People today don't choose God without God first choosing them. The Holy Spirit works in our lives and awakens our dead souls to life. God is intimately involved in our salvation. If he left it up to us we would still be fishing by the sea. This should cause us to praise God for his great love for us. He chose us while we were still sinners and called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. I would encourage you to spend some time this week reflecting on your own salvation and the grace God has shown you; thanking God for the way he has given you new life, making you a new creation.

But God doesn't force our belief when we are called. We must make the choice to repent of our sins. It requires an action from us. Jesus preached to the people to repent, to turn away from their sin and turn towards God. Repentance requires a decisive action and the disciples did just that. Peter and Andrew were casting a net and James and John were mending a net with their father when Jesus called them. The men heard the call and immediately left their nets, boats, and even their dad and followed Jesus.

The disciples weren't doing a sinful action when they were fishing. They didn't need to repent of their work but they did need to turn from one way of life to another in response to Jesus' call. Pastor Mike Bullmore said that Jesus calls people to a radical, costly, reorientation of their life.³ The disciples were facing the Sea of Galilee and they turned a hundred and eighty degrees to the land. That is a radical change. They turned from what they knew to the unknown and they followed Jesus. They turned from one way of living to a better way of living.

This call to repent and follow Jesus is the same for people today. We are called to turn away from our sin and to turn towards God. If you have never trusted in Jesus' work on your behalf for your salvation I would encourage you to do so immediately. Repent and believe in the same way the disciples did in Matthew 4. Don't let anything hold you back.

But once you have believed the gospel you aren't done repenting. The day you believed the gospel is the day that you became a Christian. It is a truly glorious thing, but you can't stop there. Jesus calls his disciples to follow him for the rest of their lives. We are to live a continual life of repentance. Our lives should be characterized by this.

I was talking with Christy about this last night and she said that this lifestyle is kind of like being a parent. When your first child is born it is a big deal! It is the day you became a parent. You now have a new title and identity. You get to leave the hospital and bring a tiny human home with you. Then after a few days the reality begins to set in. You realize that this isn't an extended babysitting arrangement. Being a parent is not about the day of your child's birth. It is the continual choices you make to care for your children and raise them well. It is getting up at all hours of the night. It is catching their puke in your hand so it doesn't get all over the floor. It is brushing their teeth each day. It is a daily choice to put their needs before your own. As we follow Christ we are to live like this. We are called to make a daily choice to follow him and when we start to waiver it is repenting of that sin and returning to him.

³ Mike Bullmore, "[Operation Rescue Fully Engaged](#)"

How are you doing in this daily choice to repent of your sins and follow Christ? Is there anything holding you back? Are you clinging to anything that is promising life but unable to deliver? If there is something, I would plead with you to immediately leave it behind and follow Christ. Repentance is radical and costly but it brings so much more than what it costs.

If you believe the gospel you are a part of God's people. But God's people are not idle. Jesus calls the disciples to follow him, and he tells them that he will make them fishers of men. They were not called to learn only, but to follow and do kingdom ministry. Later, in chapter 10, he will send them out to do the same work he is doing here in chapter 4. They were empowered by God to preach the gospel and show that the kingdom had come near. This is what God's people do. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to go forth proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of heaven. Let us obediently be God's people, living in God's place, who actively call people to live under his blessing and rule as we obediently do the same.