

GOD'S KINGDOM COME

Text: Matthew 4:18-25

Read: Luke 4:14-21

1: Jesus calls fishers of men

Jesus' call

Jesus' promise

2: Jesus introduces the kingdom of God

Teaching

Preaching

Healing

And so: *Be busy in the kingdom of God*

Mt 4:18-25 rev

Dear Congregation

If you look back to the passage before this one, you see Jesus beginning his ministry in earnest. He hears that John the Baptist had been put in prison and can't continue his ministry any more. It was the kind of sign Jesus had been waiting for. The baton had now been passed on to him - he was the one now running this gospel race. He starts to preach the same message as John, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'

And he continues that in the verses we're looking at here. He travels around Galilee wanting to tell as many people as possible. His message and reputation spread around Israel, and into the surrounding districts.

At the same time he has an eye to the future, he wants to increase the number of people bringing the message. And so he starts to handpick disciples to travel with him as he teaches, preaches and heals. And eventually they become the 12 he sends out to do the same thing he's doing, and then later on again, the 72. It's the snowball effect being put to good use – starting off small, but doing the kinds of things that in time will bring exponential growth. It's like the mustard seed in Jesus' parable – one of the smallest of seeds, but one that grows into one of the largest plants in the garden.

Point 1

And so first of all here, *Jesus handpicks particular people and calls them to change their profession.* He calls them to leave behind the life they've been living and to follow him as his disciples instead.

And that's not a small thing to ask, is it? You might know how traumatic it can be to leave the life you know, and head out into the unknown. Most of us have probably done that at one time or another, leaving one country for another, or leaving our parents and starting a family of our own, or leaving one career and heading into something completely different. It's a big thing to ask.

But that's what Jesus is calling these men to do - leave their old life behind and follow him as their teacher and guide. And they do.

Which probably means that they've had some contact with them already. They've probably already heard him speak. Maybe they've already had one-on-one heart-to-hearts with him. They've come to recognise his authority.

As well as that he's come to have a sense about them. He's come to realise that these are the kind of men to continue his ministry after him. In fact, 3 of the 4 named here become part of the group that's closest to him throughout his ministry. And so, even though, in Jesus' day, it was usually the disciple who chose which Rabbi to follow, when Jesus took this unusual step of calling these men to follow him, they recognised his authority and responded to the call.

It's really the same way that people have recognised God's authority right down through the ages and responded to his call.

You can go to Genesis 12 where God calls Abram to leave his country, people and household and go to the land he would show him. His promise to Abram was that he would make him into a great nation, bless him, make his name great, bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him, all peoples would be blessed through him.

Or you can go to Isaiah 41 where God says to Israel, 'But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, 'You are my servant'; I have chosen you and not rejected you.' God's promise to Israel was that he was with them, he was their God, he would be their strength and help.

And Jesus is doing a similar thing here. He has God-given authority. As we saw from the first chapter a few weeks ago, he is the new Israel. And he's handpicking leaders for his kingdom - choosing them, calling them.

And ***his call is that they follow him***. At first you could take that to just mean what any disciple would be to any other Rabbi. But as you read the rest of Matthew, you realise that it's a call to a whole lot more than that - because Jesus is the King of this kingdom of heaven. He expects to be acknowledged as the King. He expects his disciples to totally commit themselves to him as the Messiah who brings salvation into the world. He expects **us** to commit to him in that way.

And he expects that we work hard to become more like him. You see that already in the beatitudes in the next chapter - blessed are the humble, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers. One of our most important goals for this coming year should be that we grow to be more like Jesus. It's worthwhile, in this coming week, for us to think through what that is going to mean for us in practice.

And a few pointers to get you started on that would include regular Bible reading and reflecting on what you read, committing to spiritual growth in holiness and godly character, repenting from sin, and obeying God's word from day to day as we discover new things from the treasure chest of his word. It's worth while even setting goals in things like regular prayer and Bible reading, and growth in character traits like holiness and godliness that we know we're weak in. It's worthwhile revisiting those goals every week so that we don't forget that that's what we're doing.

And then, as well as the call to follow him, ***Jesus' cryptic promise is that he will make them fishers of men***. They were already fishermen, but he would make them fishers of men, he would have them bringing people into the kingdom using the gospel as their net. Unlike the other Rabbis of his day, Jesus didn't want them to only listen and learn, he wanted them to be involved. He wanted workers for the harvest.

And Jesus still wants us to be involved like that today. Passages like the Great Commission make that clear.

And so another thing we'll want to be working at this year is outreach. We need to think through for ourselves what that's going to mean for us in practice, from day to day. It means things like praying daily for non-Christians we come into contact with, building friendships with them over time, sharing the gospel with them in some appropriate kind of way when we can, inviting them to Christian activities – maybe an Introducing God course or Sunday School or Cadets or Calvinettes or your new Growth Group, and teaching them about the gospel when you can.

And again, we can set goals for ourselves in that. We can make a list of 5 or 10 non-Christians that we bump into from week to week and pray for them every day. We can set time aside in our diaries every week or fortnight to catch up with some of them and build a friendship. We can aim to share the gospel with at least one of them every month in some simple way. And setting those goals, and keeping them in the front of our Bible or diary, and revisiting them every week or two will help us make sure that we are doing something about sharing the gospel, rather than just hoping that it will happen.

Point 2

And then, looking at the second half of this passage, you see *Jesus introducing in practice the kingdom* that he and John the Baptist have been preparing people for. It's not only near, it has come.

In fact, the process has been a bit like publicity you sometimes see. First of all, ads appear that tell you that something is on the way – no explanation or detail, but just getting you familiar with the idea. Then a couple of weeks later information begins to come out that builds your expectations. And then finally the big day arrives, and the only question now is whether the event can live up to the build up.

And God had been doing something like that from the very beginning. First of all there was the promise in Genesis 3:15. Then the Old Testament prophets prophesying that salvation and the Messiah were on their way, but how and when and who wasn't explained very clearly. Finally John the Baptist came calling people to repent for the kingdom of God was near, the time was imminent. And then finally in Jesus the kingdom comes. The only question after that was whether it could live up to the expectation.

And you see that *Jesus encouraged people to enter the kingdom through his teaching, preaching, and healing.*

You see an example of his *teaching* in Luke chapter 4.

He's in the synagogue in Nazareth. And he reads from the prophet Isaiah, 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He's sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' It's a passage that looked forward to the coming kingdom of God, the age of salvation, when the shadows of the Old Testament would be fulfilled, when healing from sin and the effects of sin would come. Jesus begins his teaching on that passage by saying, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

And we've already seen an example of his *preaching* back in verse 17. His message was a call to repentance because the kingdom of heaven was only as far away as faith and trust in him.

And then, as a demonstration of the kingdom, Jesus *healed* the sick and demon possessed. You can find example after example of that after the Sermon on the Mount, from chapter 8 on.

What Jesus was doing was demonstrating that he is the King in the kind of way that Adam was before the fall. He can restore things back to the way they should be.

Adam fell for Satan's temptation, but Jesus stands against it.

Adam took all of humanity into sin and death with him. Jesus has authority over sin, sickness and death. In contrast to Adam he resists sin, he forgives the sin of others, he heals sickness, he raises the dead.

Adam faced Satan and lost – Jesus faces Satan and wins. As he says to Pharisees in chapter 12, 'If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ... how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man?'

What you see as Jesus heals the sick and demon-possessed is a touch of heaven here on earth. You see

splashes of Paradise everywhere Jesus goes. As people trust him, heaven opens to them, and they experience a little more of the way things are meant to be – sickness healed, suffering taken away, tears wiped away, pain relieved. Jesus is the window between heaven and earth.

And what that does first of all is take us back to Genesis 1&2 where we see the way creation was in the very beginning. Jesus is beginning to restore things to that original design – no sin, no sickness, no death.

As well as that he's taking us forward to Rev 21&22 where you see that process completed.

The question for the folk in Jesus' day was whether they wanted to be a part of this - would they enter the kingdom of heaven and take the first step toward experiencing the perfection that creation once enjoyed, and will again. Some said 'yes' and put their faith and trust in Jesus as their King. Others said 'no', and didn't.

And we're faced with the same question. Do we want a place in Paradise Restored when Jesus comes again? Do we want to experience a perfect creation? If we do, the thing for us to do too is turn from our sin and put our faith and trust in Jesus the King.

And then we can be amazed and inspired by what the kingdom of heaven is, and will be – and the fact that we have a place in it. We can look forward to its fulfilment when Jesus returns. It becomes the thing that gives us comfort, hope and security for the future – that keeps us from despair. You can understand why Jesus, the apostles, and generations of Christians since have been willing to stake even their lives on this future. If this is really what we can look forward to in eternity, how could even the threat of death turn us away from it?

It means too that we can understand, why these same generations of Christians have been willing to work so hard for the kingdom – helping others enter it, helping it's citizens in to grow in their walk with God, expanding its influence throughout the world. This is something worth living for. This is something worth working for.

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And if we really do have a clear sense of what eternity holds for God's kingdom citizens, we'll want to be committed to growing and working in it as well. We'll be committed to thinking about how we can grow in the coming year as a citizen in God's kingdom. How we can grow in becoming more like him. How we can be busy and active in outreach and ministry. Let's all keep this picture of God's kingdom before us. And let's all grow in our commitment to serving God and his kingdom in the ways that he wants us to.