

Called to Discipleship

Bible Background • MATTHEW 4:12–22

Printed Text • MATTHEW 4:12–22 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 91

Aim for Change

In today's lesson we will: RECOGNIZE how the disciples accepted Jesus' call; REFLECT on how choosing to follow Jesus transformed their lives; and WORSHIP God for the blessings in our lives that have come because we follow Jesus.

In Focus

Scott had built a reputation as an excellent basketball player in his town. One day, Scott decided he didn't want to play basketball alone, so he approached Bobby and his brothers at the community basketball court. Bobby had a great three-point shot and knew how to steal the ball with ease. Scott told Bobby, "Hey man. I've seen your skills; you're good. How about you join my team? You could be good just playing with your brothers, or we could all work together and show the community what a real team looks like. We could build an interstate league."

Bobby replied, "A league? That would be awesome. But how would we get enough people? And how can I just leave my home to play basketball?"

Scott said, "Don't worry about leaving home. Home will remain home, but you have a gift worth sharing. Join me! With faith and consistency, people will want to know more about us."

After three weeks of playing together at the community basketball court, Scott, Bobby, and Bobby's brothers got an invitation to play in another town. Eventually seven other young men joined them and people would follow the team to watch them play their games.

Are we invited or forced to be disciples of Christ? How has Christ invited us?

Keep in Mind

"And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19, KJV).

Words You Should Know

A. **Repent** metaneo (Gk.) — Rethink or change one's mind, meaning turn to God.

B. Straightway eutheos (Gk.) — Immediately.

Say It Correctly

Naphtali(m). NAF-tuh-lee(m).

Zebulun. ZEB-yoo-luhn.

Zebedee. ZEB-i-dee.

KJV

Matthew 4:12 Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee;

13 And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim:

14 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

15 The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles;

16 The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.

22 And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

NIV

Matthew 4:12 When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he left Judea and returned to Galilee.

13 He went first to Nazareth, then left there and moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

14 This fulfilled what God said through the prophet Isaiah:

15 “In the land of Zebulun and of Naphtali, beside the sea, beyond the Jordan River, in Galilee where so many Gentiles live,

16 the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light. And for those who lived in the land where death casts its shadow, a light has shined.”

17 From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”

18 One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers— Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew— throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living.

19 Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!”

20 And they left their nets at once and followed him.

21 A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too.

22 They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind.

The People, Places, and Times

Matthew. The author of the Gospel of Matthew. His name means “gift of Jehovah,” and he is also known by his priestly tribal name, Levi (Mark 2:14). Matthew wrote the genealogy of Christ and documents His claim to be Messiah. Matthew was a publican, a Jewish man employed by the conquering Romans to collect taxes. The Jewish people saw him as a traitor, and they despised him. After his conversion to Christ, Matthew’s ministry was to preach mostly to the Jews. He cites Old Testament Scripture nearly 100 times in his Gospel, and he mentions the phrase “kingdom of heaven” thirty-two times (e.g., Matthew 13:1–53). He was present at the ascension of Jesus.

Background

As His earthy ministry and reputation gained prominence throughout the region— from Nazareth to Judea, Samaria, and Galilee—Jesus experienced rejection, opposition, and escalating hostility. Particularly in His hometown of Nazareth, the reaction to His ministry ranged from amazement to mistrust. However, no reaction was harsher than that of the Roman government under Herod.

Herod’s familial line had been particularly violent throughout all its generations. From Herod the Great (73–4 BC), who slaughtered all of Bethlehem’s males under the age of two, to Herod Antipas (c. 20 BC–AD 39), who ordered the execution of John the Baptist, they had a deep history of resisting God’s purposes and rejecting God’s prophets, and they used any means necessary to silence opponents.

The Romans were becoming even more hostile and violent in their rejection of Jesus. After John the Baptist was arrested, Herod Antipas took the power and presence of the kingdom of God head-on. Imprisoned for condemning Herod’s incestuous relationship with his niece Herodias, John refused to be silenced (Matthew 4:12; Mark 6:17). Herod Antipas, whom Jesus called “that fox” (Luke 13:32), reacted in typical Roman fashion—he wanted John dead.

After learning of John’s death, Jesus moved to Capernaum, an important seaport city located on a major trade route. More important, His actions triggered fulfillment of a centuries- old revelation that the Messiah would be the light to the land allocated by divine covenant to the tribes of Zebulon and Naphtali, where Capernaum was located.

At-A-Glance

1. Jesus Starts His Ministry (Matthew 4:12–16)
2. The Kingdom of Heaven (v. 17)
3. Called as Disciples (vv. 18–22)

In Depth

1. Jesus Starts His Ministry (Matthew 4:12–16)

Jesus commences His ministry in an unexpected place—Galilee. Galileans were considered unclean, and the region had a disproportionate number of those who were considered heathens. Referred to as “Galilee of the Gentiles,” the province was populated by Phoenicians, Arabians, Syrians, and Greeks. Jewish Galileans were generally wealthy and extreme in their religious bigotry. It is in this highly diverse mosaic of people, economic statuses, occupations, cultures, beliefs, biases, and attitudes that Jesus chooses to start His ministry.

Jesus moves to Capernaum, located on the Sea of Galilee. This puts Him in the heart of a region where the weight of Roman occupation and oppression overshadows the landscape. The people have been plunged into a pervasive Roman darkness marked by taxes and death. Jesus preaches, using familiar prophecies in His message and offering a great light of deliverance to the people “living in darkness,” “living in the land of the shadow of death.” This was the same promise of God spoken by the prophet Isaiah. God said that the Messiah would be the light to the land of Zebulon and Naphtali and that God will make glorious “the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations” (Isaiah 9:1).

Kingdoms under human authority are in a constant state of darkness. Jesus is still calling the nations to come out of the darkness into the kingdom of light under God’s authority.

How does Jesus' arrival in Capernaum fulfill the prophecies of the coming Messiah, delivered by Isaiah? How can we use these Scriptures to give hope to those "living in darkness"?

2. The Kingdom of Heaven (v. 17)

From the beginning of His ministry, Jesus consistently expressed His concern for saving the people from sin and for establishing the presence of God in their lives. Using the same language spoken by John the Baptist, Jesus adds a sense of urgency to His message: The kingdom of heaven is near. Aiming directly at hearts that live in the darkness of sin, Jesus offers them the light of God and the keys to the kingdom by way of repentance. The kingdom of heaven is closer than the people realize.

How can we live our lives in ways that show our repentance? How will you show others how your life changed after you came out of the darkness of sin and into the light of Jesus?

3. Called as Disciples (vv. 18–22)

Jesus sees two men, Simon (called Peter), and Andrew, while He is walking by the Sea of Galilee. These brothers are fishermen engaged in their trade when Jesus challenges them to disrupt all societal norms and conventional expectations. Both men are engaged in meeting their family's living needs. Both men have as a priority meeting the fishing quotas they paid as in-kind taxes to tax collectors on behalf of Rome.

Jesus invites Simon Peter and Andrew to re-order their priorities. He offers them the opportunity to catch something much more valuable than fish. In following Jesus, they will fish for people. Fishermen had a reputation for being rough and unpolished, and were largely despised. But when Jesus appears, their lives change. They immediately accept Jesus' transformational call, which gives them new purpose for their lives. They are experienced and well-prepared for their calling, but instead of catching food to feed the body for a short time, Simon Peter and Andrew will be casting their nets to catch people for eternal life.

How can we become better "fishers of people"? How can we extend our nets farther to draw in more people for Jesus?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why did Jesus move from Nazareth to Capernaum (Matthew 4:12–13)? Compare how Jesus was received in the two cities (See Matthew 13: 53–58).
2. What message did Jesus preach (v. 17)?
3. How did Simon and Andrew respond when Jesus called them (v. 22)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. When you first accepted the call to follow Jesus, how did you feel? Nervous? Confident? Reserved?
2. Since Jesus came into your life, how has your life changed for the better?
3. How would your life have been different had you not followed Jesus?

Liberating Lesson

Many times, we get complacent in our attitude about life. We claim: "if it ain't broke don't fix it." We remain content to stay in our lane or stick to what we know; we don't ever want to make waves. Yet, we often lament that nothing changes in our lives and that we can't ever seem to get ahead, leaving us unfulfilled and uninspired. Repeatedly doing the same thing the same way but expecting a different outcome is popularly described as "insanity." Jesus knows that living under God's authority requires making a life change. His ministry inspires this transformation.

As a prophet, He challenges people with unpopular spiritual truths. As the Son of God, He offers the kingdom of heaven to those who repent. As the Son of God, He offers forgiveness to those who rejected Him because they could not see beyond the man.

Jesus calls all kinds of people to be disciples. Simon Peter and Andrew were motivated to answer the call, and they willingly left their comfort zone for Jesus. They did not make excuses about the inconvenience of following Him. Instead, they acted immediately. Jesus calls each of us to follow Him, and to use all that we have for the kingdom of heaven. When He asks us to serve Him, we must be like the disciples. We must act immediately.

Has a reluctant spirit hindered you from responding to Jesus? Are you uncomfortable changing the way you do things, yet get frustrated when nothing changes for the better in your life? When Jesus calls, how will you answer?

Application for Activation

How is Jesus calling you to work as His disciple? We can use perspective and skills we already possess to share the Good News of salvation through Christ Jesus.

- Ask God to show you how to do more in casting your net as a “fisher of people.”
- Do you have access to social media? Use this platform to reach out to others.
- Pray for those who may reject you. Pray for God to send someone from whom they will receive His truth.
- Examine your discipleship. Are you content with going along to get along? Do you need to change the way you are doing things to become a more effective disciple for Jesus.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

12 Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; 13 And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim:

John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin, and as we learn from the beginning of Luke (Luke 1:39–56), their families were close. John the Baptist baptized Jesus, he was the forerunner of Jesus, and he publicly acknowledged that Jesus was not just his younger cousin but the Lamb of God and the Messiah who would take away the sins of the world.

John the Baptist was widely recognized as a prophet in first century Judea after nearly 400 years of there being no prominent prophet in Israel following the death of Malachi. John proclaimed that everyone should repent and return to God's ways rather than the ways of the Roman Empire and its idolatry. Because of his influence, the religious and political leaders hesitated to kill John for fear of inciting rebellion. However, they wanted to silence him and preserve their reputations. The compromise was to place John in prison. Jesus—tested in the wilderness by Satan, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit—walked into his place as the preeminent prophet in Judea. Jesus journeys from His hometown in Nazareth to another part of the Galilean region, a city called Capernaum that becomes a second home and home base for His ministry.

14 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, 15 The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; 16 The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. 17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Matthew has already referenced Jesus' fulfillment of several prophecies (1:23; 2:6, 15, 18, 23). Now he makes it clear that Jesus beginning His public ministry with the power of the Holy Spirit in Capernaum is yet another fulfillment of biblical prophecy (cf. Isaiah 9:1–2)—that the land of Zebulon and Naphtali, two tribes of Israel that were in darkness and under the judgment of God, would be made glorious because of God's mercy. Then Jesus preaches that all Israel should repent (Gk. *metanoeo*, meh-ta-no-EH-oh, rethink or change one's mind) and turn back to God and away from idols because the kingdom of God is "at hand" or near. Jesus' exhortation is clear: The old way of being under the bondage of sin is done; renew your minds and recommit to God because the reign of God is here!

18 And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

In these verses, we see the power of Jesus' call and the type of obedience He desires. This passage is the only extended report, in the Gospel of Matthew, of how Jesus chose His disciples. There is a brief description of how Matthew, the tax collector, was called (Matthew 9:9). But there is no mention of the calling of the other seven disciples. Peter and Andrew, two brothers, were described as men who were making a decent living as professional fishermen. They were, no doubt, good at what they were doing and felt confident in their abilities. They were about the business of fishing, casting their nets into the sea, when Jesus appeared.

When Jesus arrives, our lives are never the same. The plans we have, the direction we think our lives are going in, can suddenly take a very dramatic turn. It's exciting and a great adventure to meet Jesus and to hear His new plans for us, but it takes courage and faith to follow Him whether we are new disciples or have walked with Him for years.

19 And He saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. 20 And they straightway left their nets and followed him.

Jesus found them at their trade and indicated to them that the same abilities they used to lure and catch fish, they would be able to use to bring people into the kingdom of God. Even though they may not have been as proficient and confident in their ability to do that, He assured them He would “make” them able to do the job.

Jesus is the one who makes all of His followers able to do the good works they are called to do. He equips and prepares us. He said to fishermen, “Follow me.” This is translated from the Greek word *deute* (DYOO-teh), which means “come.” It is a command or exhortation. Jesus clearly expected them to obey and follow Him.

They responded, the text says, “straightway,” translated from the Greek word *eutheos* (ew-THEH-oc), which means “immediately.” They left their nets and followed Him. Some Christians today are called to do exactly that, to leave their jobs and professions and follow Jesus’ call into ministry. Seminaries are full of “second career” students who have left comfortable positions in law, advertising, teaching, journalism, and other careers to become fishers of people. But even those Christians who are not called to leave everything behind and start over are called to follow Jesus. We are all to be evangelists, drawing people into the kingdom, through the way we live, the way we serve, and the people we are. The type of obedience Jesus wants is just what these disciples immediately exemplify. Sometimes, our tendency is to wait or put it off until everything is right, but we should choose to follow the Lord immediately, because tomorrow might be too late.

21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. 22 And they immediately left the ship and their father and followed him.

Jesus goes on to call two more disciples, James and John, who are also referred to as the Sons of Thunder (Mark 3:17). They, too, were in their boat, doing work related to their profession as fishermen alongside their father. But when Jesus called, they responded immediately and left the boat. Matthew mentions that they left their father and followed Jesus. Here is an illustration of how following Jesus can sometimes cause stress in your family.

Many scholars have struggled, trying to figure out the meaning behind Jesus’ words that He “came not to send peace, but a sword... to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother” (from Matthew 10:34–36). Or when He said that if you do not “hate” your mother and father and all your relatives, you “cannot be” His disciple (Luke 14:26). Basically, scholars have agreed that Jesus was establishing the kingdom as a priority for His followers. This priority takes precedence over these all-important family relationships. In most cultures there is great respect for elders and families, and this is a very good thing. We do want to love our families and give of ourselves to them. But nothing, and no one should stand in the way of following Jesus. The Father to whom we owe our greatest loyalty and obedience is our heavenly Father. Sometimes, like James and John, part of our call may mean leaving behind our family of origin, comfort, and familiarity to follow God’s call for our lives.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Jethro Hears of the Egyptian Deliverance
(Exodus 18:1–9)

TUESDAY

Sustained by God
(Deuteronomy 8:1–11)

WEDNESDAY

God Speaks to Disciples
(Luke 9:28–36)

THURSDAY

Well Pleased
(Matthew 3:11–17)

FRIDAY

Tempted in the Wilderness
(Matthew 4:1–11)

SATURDAY

Good News and Healing
(Matthew 4:23–25)

SUNDAY

Called and Enabled for Ministry
(Matthew 4:12–22)