

## Matthew 4:12-25

Good to be back again after missing last week – next part of Matthew pick up threads of our story ('story so far' – apologise visitors). Matthew retelling story of Israel, showing how everything God promised Israel is fulfilled in Jesus.

- Ch2 Start with spiritual seekers from East to promised land
- The flight to Egypt and return (2<sup>nd</sup> half ch2)
- Then judgement of oppressors and journey through water
- Last week (ch4 1<sup>st</sup> half) – into desert – Jesus proves faithful where Israel disobeyed, so proving he is true Son & true King. So what happens next?

Scholarly debate how next bit fits in – could be 2 things:

- Appoints leaders – Jethro challenges Moses in Ex 18 – matches calling disciples. Good fit – Ex 19 Sinai and giving of law – TSOTM follows next in Matt ch5
- OR looser re-telling of story – Jesus quotes Deut in temptation immediately before Joshua takes land. This part of ch4 feels like taking of land – by end of ch READ 4:25. So I quite like that, though means that giving of law out of sync. Doesn't matter much – either way, this episode fits with this idea of re-telling story.

But story takes new twist here: public ministry begins in earnest – Jesus announces his arrival in a big way. Key phrase at heart v17 – 'kingdom of heaven is near'. Not first time – cf 3:2 same message as JtB. Not an earthly kingdom – unlike Joshua, if Jesus conquering land, not for earthly kingdom, but a spiritual one: kingdom of heaven. Think about kingdom today, and what can learn from this passage.

Idea of kingdom incredibly important – foundational to our thinking. We talk about church now, but Jesus didn't, he talks about the kingdom. Church is the community of kingdom – visible part of it, but kingdom is bigger than that. It is place where God reigns (he's king of kingdom)

...but not the only kingdom. NT clash of kingdoms: kingdom of world (or devil) and kingdom of God (or heaven here). Big cosmic conflict – e.g. in first half of ch4 – devil confronts Jesus, clash of kingdoms.

Now Jesus begins his public ministry – coincides with John's imprisonment v12 (forced? keep momentum?). Think of it like an invasion. Dominant power is kingdom of world, standing against God and under power of evil one. *New invading force – kingdom of heaven, it's near.*

Bit like D-Day – continent under power of Nazi Germany – D-Day establishes a foothold from which the war can be won.

*Here's spiritual equivalent of D-Day.* God comes into our world and now his public ministry begins. The kingdom of heaven is near, a foothold has been established and reign of God starts to manifest on earth. Like that little patch of north western France secured by D-Day, Jesus secures a landing spot from which kingdom can advance.

Key question – what does it look like when kingdom of heaven comes near? Passage tells us 3 things:

**Kingdom is proclaimed** – READ v17 (reinforced v24). Sound obvious, doesn't it? Got a new message – need to tell people. When I worked in marketing I specialised in evaluating advertising – basic idea. Need to tell message. Maybe it is a message we need to hear today – sometimes church does everything apart from tell people the good news. We visit people, welcome them, cry with them, laugh with them, pray with them, care for them – and that is all great. Of course we do that. But quite often we don't tell them.

Jesus did. He could do all that other stuff, and more. But we must never forget what his primary purpose was. As Luke puts it: READ Luke 4:42-44.

Let's not give up on telling people. Not everyone will want to hear it. Sometimes it's better to wait for a word in season. Sometimes we need the right vehicle: not always preaching, though in my experience people will listen if you have something worth saying. But let's keep proclaiming.

**Kingdom is demonstrated.** One of less salubrious divides of last century is between 2 groups of Christians: on one side – gospel is all about proclamation. On other – it's all about demonstration, i.e. good works. Truth is beautifully simple: it's both. Jesus preaches the kingdom, but he also demonstrates it. Back to v24 – READ.

Two great temptations: make bible fit what we want it to say, rather than what it actually says (and most of time, what it says it straightforward, question is whether we want to accept it). And to systematise and simplify things. How did we spend a century arguing over whether priority was preaching or demonstration? Jesus didn't: he just got on and did both. And each complemented the other. What he did authenticated what he preached. And that's the point, isn't it? Works without a message is just do-gooding. A message without works is hot air. But both together is dynamite.

*I want to be part of church that is passionately committed to both: proclaiming and demonstrating the kingdom.* And not just demonstrating with good works in a general sense, I mean the sort of stuff we see here, stuff that requires the supernatural intervention of God. Yes we have the NHS, and we should thank God for that every day. It's amazing. But God still heals today. I have seen it with my own eyes.

I have seen someone crippled with arthritis opening his hand for the first time in years, and that same man see his blood circulation improve so dramatically that he dropped 1 ½ shoe sizes in a week.

Or a man with such high blood pressure that he had permanent tinnitus prayed for one evening and the next day get tested at the docs and have BP of young man in 20s.

I have seen a man with cerebral palsy deaf in one ear since birth recover hearing in that ear after prayer.

I have seen a lump on a wrist disappear immediately after prayer.

It happens. The Western church is the only church in the world where most people believe it doesn't happen. But it happens here as well.

Mystery to it – God heals according to his will. I don't know why some people see miraculous healing and others don't. But let's not give up on God. The kingdom is near and it shows itself in demonstration.

Finally, **the kingdom grows**. Chunk in middle is most famous. 'I will make you fishers of men.' What I love about this little episode is intimacy of it. Large crowds, thousands of people: but Jesus calls individuals. He calls us. He calls you. What does he call?

Come – to follow Jesus we need to come to him. Jesus is not a moral teacher like Buddha. If you're looking for moral principles, you've missed point. It's a relationship first: we come to Jesus.

But then we follow. It's dynamic, active. We talk about believing: Jesus more interested in followers than believers. Use 'Christian' less, more 'follower of Jesus'. Where he goes, we go. 'Covered in dust of rabbi.'

Or what will it mean. Well, Jesus will take your life and transform it into something bigger and more beautiful. That's what fishers of men phrase means. He'll take your gifts and passions and talents and use them on a grander scale. It'll be harder and more demanding and more costly and more life-giving and more extraordinary and more beautiful all at the same time. It's what repent really means. Message Bible: 'Change your life.'

So the kingdom comes, it's near, and how do we know? It's proclaimed and demonstrated, and inevitably, it grows. Jesus calls people into it. Is he calling you? Maybe you've been on the sidelines for a bit. You're in that boat fiddling with the nets. Or maybe you've sat on the shore and watched those boats for years. And Jesus is calling you into the game. Come, follow me. Enough spectating. Enough time working on those nets. I'm here to preach the kingdom, and do something about it. Are you with me?