

Title: An Impressive Start
Text: Matthew 4.12-25
Theme: The beginning of his ministry
Series: Matthew #11
Prop Stmt: From the beginning Jesus made it clear that his ministry and message (kingdom) were unlike anything that you would have thought.

Read Text:

I walked into a grocery store the other day and was met by a lady who asked me if I wanted to be included in a drawing for a \$100 in free groceries. I asked her, “So, what’s the catch?” We all know that people do not simply give away groceries for free. We call that a “bait and switch.” Hang out the bait and then after the person is hooked, you pull out the fine print. The catch, in this case, was in my opinion too much of a hassle to mess with and given the fact that the odds of winning were astronomically low I declined the offer.

Jesus, it seems had the opposite problem. He never used a bait and switch method. He did not entice people with an illusion and then switch the terms on them. In fact, Jesus always told people what they needed to hear. The problem was, either people did not hear him, or they only heard the parts that they liked. This is a problem that we are going to see over and over in our study of Matthew’s gospel. People “love” Jesus as long as he does what they want, but when they realize that he is saying that they need to change, then the sparks begin to fly.

Now, while this was a problem wherever Jesus went, it seemed to be intensified in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is where the power and influence was. Jerusalem was where all of the important people were. Jesus did not play by those rules. He was not into perception or image, he dealt with and still only deals with reality. He did not play those games, which made him appear to be an outsider. So, when he begins his public ministry, he does not go to where the influential people are, he goes to where the need was.

1. **Jesus went to where the need was.** (12-16)

- a. **John’s arrest** (12)

While Jesus spent some time in Judea following his time in the desert, the formal launching of his public ministry takes place in Galilee. Matthew points out that one of the factors influencing Christ going to Galilee was the arrest of John the Baptist. Matthew will pick that part of the story back up in chapter 14, but for now, we see in John the Baptist an example of one whose life illustrates the point that I just made. John’s ministry was to pave the way for Christ. His arrest is the trigger point for Christ’s ministry to begin because now, John’s part was completed. Circumstantially, John did not benefit much from the ministry of Christ. In fact, while Christ was healing and teaching, John

was rotting in a prison. It is all part of God's plan. John's ministry is essentially done. He is arrested, and Jesus withdraws from Judea and goes to Galilee where he begins to make an impact.

b. Capernaum - Galilee (13)

Galilee was not a large area, but it was great land for farming and for raising animals and attracted many people to it. The Jewish historian Josephus said that the smallest village had 15,000 people in it, which is probably an exaggeration. But, there were a lot people in this region and many of them were not Jews. This was the more northern region of Israel that and was a road to Syria and the rest of the world. Judea (Jerusalem) was more mountainous and therefore more isolated. But, since Jerusalem was where the Temple was, there was a sense that the true Jews were associated more with Jerusalem, while the mixed ethnicities in Galilee were despised and of course, the Samaritans were hated. Interestingly, Jesus sets up headquarters in Capernaum, a city "by the sea" that was on the north-western edge of the Sea of Galilee.

c. As prophesied (14-17)

600 years before, Isaiah spoke of the Messiah who was going to come to this region that was named after the tribes of Zebulon and Naphtali. God had planned for the Messiah to go to this region because the people were so needy. There are two descriptions in this prophecy that stand out to us. 1) The region is known as "Galilee of the Gentiles." This underscores the point that I just made about how this area was viewed (impure) by many of the Jews. 2) They are described as dwelling in darkness, meaning they were despondent. These are people who are trapped in a condition of hopelessness that they do not think that they will ever get out. These are not happy people full of hope and promise. These are people who have been repeatedly overrun by armies and kings, used and discarded and yet really have nowhere else to go. These are the people who live in the shadow of death. That is, they live with the reality of death right next to them.

Last weekend a 6th grade girl in our Connect ministry was home when her 19 year old sister killed by her boyfriend on her front porch. Life is so cheap and violence is so prevalent that it is so common to kill. It is no longer shocking, but expected. I have said repeatedly that our attempt to legalize abortion and justify the murder of the most vulnerable among us is like pumping toxic fumes into the cultural atmosphere or arsenic into the water of society. We all breath it. We all drink it, and it is slowly killing us. The effect of violence like that makes us less than human. We are numb, dulled by the repeated effects of being shocked so that we do not feel it any longer. Our sense of optimism, hope and future is dying. Death and violence mark us as a nation. Do unto others before they do into you is our rule. We are becoming hollow, empty machines that just exist. This was Galilee. This is where Jesus went.

Now, keep this in mind. Jesus not only launches his ministry in this less than ideal setting, he also calls people to follow him, meaning, he calls people to be involved with him in ministering to people who themselves were very needy. It seems that most of the

disciples were from this region, so they did not seem to struggle as much with ministering to needy people. They had to work through some of this at times as well. But they came from needy situations and were forged into a band of men who would pour their lives into helping needy people. At the time, Jesus appeared to pick up some real losers, but later on, it would be clear that Christ knew what he was doing all along. All we know at this point is that Christ went to where you would not think and preached what you would not expect to hear.

2. **Jesus said what needed to be heard.** (17)

This is a very important concept for us to grab. Christ, like John, preached a message of repentance and he linked the call to repent to the establishment of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is the same thing as the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ. The ultimate manifestation of this kingdom is the formal reign of Jesus Christ as King over his people in a place of astounding beauty and perfection. It is a place where heaven has literally come to earth and where God lives among his people. This kingdom is a spiritual, political, environmental, physical and governmental reality.

But, what is foundational to this kingdom is the spiritual component. Foundational to Christ ruling over all is Christ ruling in all. Before Christ is going to rule over you, he demands to rule in you. The promise of glory with Christ only comes from the reign of Christ in your life. Therefore, Christ begins his ministry by preaching a message of repentance. Repentance means to change your mind, your affections and your actions (direction). Repentance means that you 1) realize that your sin is wrong and offensive to God 2) it becomes grievous to you and 3) you turn away from it. This (repentance) is part of what it means to be converted, or later on in the Bible we are introduced to the word "saved." To be converted or to be saved involves repentance and faith. But this point, Christ is not yet giving the rest of the story. In order for people to realize that they need to turn to Christ to be changed, they must first be convicted that they need the change to begin with.

So, Jesus begins to preach a message of repentance. It will not be long, before he will demonstrate that He is the One that they must then turn to. But, that is yet to come. They must (and we must) first realize that we have a need. In order for Jesus to redeem you, or save you, or change you, you must realize what the true nature of your problem is. Your problem is fundamentally not your circumstances, but it is your own sin. If you only want to follow Jesus because you want him to change your circumstances, then you are not following Jesus, you are attempting to use Jesus. Jesus is not your spiritual pharmacist, he is King. He is not the means to your goals, He is the goal. We are the means to his goal. And since his goal is good and great, our participation in the advancement of his glory and kingdom is absolutely fantastic. But, this was not understood then and it, for the most part, is still not understood. That is why, people want to add Jesus to their lives without repenting of their sins. They want forgiveness without repenting. They want a Savior but not a King. They want a helper but not a Sovereign Lord. But you cannot embrace Jesus as your Savior and King and hold on to your sin.

A young guy, who was attending here became convinced that he should trust in Christ and came and talked with me about it. He was living with his girlfriend. I know that living with your girlfriend or boyfriend is assumed by our culture, but it is a sin. Being sexually involved with someone who is not your spouse, is wrong. So, I asked this guy what he was going to do because he had to make a choice. He could not follow Christ and chose to hold on to his sin. In his case, he moved out and trusted Christ. A young lady, who was attending here, became excited that she was learning things about the Bible that she had never understood before. It was starting to make sense and she loved the idea of Jesus being her Savior, until she realized that living with her boyfriend was a sin, and then, she did not want to be “saved” from that. That was asking too much. There are plenty of places that will tell you how wonderful Jesus is, and that we should follow the example of Jesus, and that we should be kind and compassionate like Jesus, but will not tell you what Jesus actually said. But remember this. Jesus was not crucified because he healed people. He was crucified because he exposed the sins of people and called them to repent and trust in him.

Right from the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus is establishing the foundation of his kingdom by preaching a message of repentance, so that we would understand that his kingdom is not first and foremost his political reign that will give us healthcare, jobs, police and fire protection, his kingdom begins by assaulting our self-righteousness, our self-sufficiency, our self-worship and demand that God affirm us and cooperate with our desires rather than our following him. This is what Jesus said. His kingdom does not start with Jesus changing your circumstances and giving you your best life now. His kingdom is built upon changing you! As we will see, what Jesus did (miracles) was all done in an effort to authenticate the message of what he said. However, what he did was so exciting, that many people simply ignored, or misunderstood what he said. They followed him and exalted him as long as the miracles were happening, but when so many of them finally realized how serious he was about repentance and faith and the obedience that comes from that, they walked away.

One day, Jesus is going to establish his kingdom on this earth in a visible, physical, environmental, political and governmental way. It is a real kingdom with a real king. But, the only people who will be permanent citizens of that kingdom are the ones who first accept his authority in their lives. What about you? Who is your king?

3. **Jesus called ordinary people to follow him.** (18-22)

The first four disciples that Jesus calls are fisherman and are two sets of brothers who worked together. Now, this is very interesting and leaves us with some questions that Matthew does not bother to inform us about, such as: what happened to the fishing business, etc.? But, a bit of background is helpful. It was very common for a rabbi or philosopher to attract a crowd because of his teaching. After a while, certain men who were really interested in learning more would ask this man if they could follow him. This was so that they might not only learn as much as possible, but they wanted to see how this man’s teachings influenced the way that he lived. So, it was very common for a man to have a following, usually small. Each mentor and group of students would have to

figure out food, shelter and supplies, and sometimes wealthy patrons would contribute because they too had been influenced positively by the teacher, or perhaps a family member had become a disciple. But, in every case, the student asked permission to be a follower. These four men do not ask to be disciples, rather Jesus commands them. The verb “follow” is not a question, it is an order. And these men realize that they do not have a choice in the matter. Obviously at this point they do not understand why, but they respond, they choose to follow in response to the order that has been given. In both cases, they respond “immediately.” In both cases, Matthew identifies that in order to follow Jesus, they had to leave something. They left their nets, they left their boat and James and John left their father. What was their father’s response to this? We do not know. We know that later on James and John’s mom gets involved in a conversation with Christ, but not much is said about Zebedee.

But, the call to follow Christ is illustrated by Peter and Andrew and James and John. These are not high-powered and influential persons. These are men from Galilee! These are fishermen. This is not a romantic position. This is a rugged job. These are 4 ordinary guys. They are not the deep-pockets, movers and shakers that are generally needed to create a sense of movement, power and influence that a young leader needs to have. These are common men, from a questionable area, with no formal education. Their resumes would not get them a second glance to any church staff. But, Jesus called them to become “fishers of men.” He understood their culture. He understood their job, and appealed to them to do something that would be even better.

Even here, Jesus makes it clear that if you are going to follow him, nothing else can compete. He demands priority. Can you be a fisherman and follow Jesus? Yes. Can you be an accountant, engineer, line worker, electrician, nurse, salesperson and follow Jesus? Yes. But, these things are not more important than Jesus. Jesus is not here to help you be successful at these jobs. We are here to make him famous in whatever we do. In this case these brothers had to leave what they were doing because following Jesus as a disciple meant being with him wherever he went. They did not know, but they were going to be serving as some of the men who founded the church. In fact, Peter, James and John would form the inner circle of the twelve. They would look back to this moment for the rest of their life and realize that from this point on, they would never be the same.

Were they converted at this point? In a sense, I guess they were, in that they left what they were doing in order to follow Jesus. But, at this point they did not know all that there was to believe on regarding Jesus. So, it is probably not the best question to ask at this point in time. This much is clear. Jesus said follow me, and they did.

4. **Jesus appeared to be the king that everyone wanted.** (23-25)

These verses summarize the early ministry of Jesus. Mark gives us some details of this in his opening chapter. But the ministry of Christ is marked by teaching (explaining things), by proclaiming (announcing the good news of the kingdom) and by healing. Matthew gives us the various categories of healing that Jesus performed; making it clear that he had authority over physical disease and had authority over demons.

Miracles draw crowds. But do not confuse crowds with converts. Jesus knew the difference between someone attracted to his miracles and someone who actually believed in what he said. Those who were impressed with his displays of power, had to hear the terms of discipleship, they had to learn what life was like as a follower of the King. They had to hear what his kingdom was really all about. Up to this point, he appeared to be the king that everyone wanted. Before this gospel account is over, he will be crucified. Why? Was it something he did? Not really. It was what he said. It was what he believed. It was who He was and is. In reality he is the King that everyone needs, but only a few will accept. Do you really follow Jesus primarily because of who He is, or do you “follow” Jesus because primarily because of what you get out of it. If you only follow Jesus because of what you get out of it, then when you are no longer getting what you think you deserve, then you will follow something else.