

The King's Spiritual Kingdom

Matthew 4:12-17

Introduction

In the opening chapter we saw Jesus and the Devil. Now we see Jesus with the desperate. His ministry will include hope for those in darkness (vv.12-17) and those disabled (vv.23-25). John the Baptist's ministry is drawing to a close. The time has come for Jesus to begin His ministry in full force and great purpose. The same is true of every believer. After our conversion to Christ—God may have us experience a time of preparation and maturation—and then send us into this world for a very specific purpose.

What is your great ministry purpose?

“The mystery of human existence lies not in just staying alive, but in finding something to live for.”

— Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

I have heard it called a magnificent obsession.

For Jesus the closing of John's ministry will signal the beginning of his own. Jesus will chose His headquarters, Capernaum. The decision is deliberate and designed to fulfill Scripture (Isaiah 9:1-2; 42:6-7). There is also a great mission; to go to needy lands and needy people. To take people trapped in darkness and show them a great light. To take people who are dead and bring them to life. With the mission comes a message; a message of hope and change—repentance (turning from sin) and reason (the Kingdom of Heaven is closer than its ever been before).

What is your ministry purpose? Have you sought the Lord to discover God's great purpose for your life? Or are you simply walking in the tasks and obligations that occupied your time before your conversion? Jesus knows His great purpose and is now ready to go out and fulfill the mission and preach the message that God has given Him to preach.

The purpose must include hope for those in darkness! A bright Light has come.

The Kingdom Headquarters (vv.12-15)

Matthew 4:12–17 (NKJV) 12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee.

Matthew is not written in chronological order. Between verses 11-12 there is a gap of about a year and a half.

Prior to his departure Jesus stayed in Nazareth. That stay ended when Jesus was violently rejected by the people of Nazareth who tried to murder Him (see Luke 4:6-30). You might think

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it is a waste of time to try to minister to people who dislike you or hate you or are trying to kill you!

In John's gospel we learn that Jesus met and enlisted John, Andrew, Peter and Phillip and Nathaniel. John the Baptist was the Herald of the King, announcing the King, preparing the people for the coming of the King. John the Baptist had been a great witness for Jesus. His uncompromising preaching and fearless witness, resulted in John's imprisonment and eventual death.

Jesus begins His public ministry when John's draws to a close. Jesus has no interest in distracting from John's message or competing for the attention and affection of the crowds. When Jesus hears of John's arrest he moves north to the Galilee. John was thrown into Herod's prison at the palace of Macharerus on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. You may recall that John condemned Herod (Antipas) marriage to his brother's wife. Her name was Herodias. She was wicked even by Roman standards. John took a public stand against sin. He condemned it and refused to condone it. It is always dangerous to take a public stand against public immorality. John's preaching and public stand would cost him his life. Many years later John Knox stood toe to toe with the wickedness of his day. When faced with the wicked and corrupt Queen Mary; Knox was rebuked for resisting her authority. Knox's response became legendary: "If princes exceed their bounds, madam, they may be resisted and deposed." Herod and Herodias thought they could rid themselves of their guilt by killing the Man of God who revealed that guilt. Little did they know that killing John simply meant that God would initiate a series of events that would change the world forever; the ministry and message of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The closing of one ministry will often make way for the beginning of a new ministry. Some leaders in this world may be able to imprison ministry leaders in China or North Korea or Iran or Sudan or other parts of the world—hostile to Christ and Christians but God continues to raise up men and women with a purpose! World leaders may think they exercise enormous power. Your boss or teacher or local politician may gloat over their ability to make life miserable for Christians or Christianity. Yet God will have the final say. Jesus must go to the Galilee. He will go to the right place at the right time to fulfill God's purposes.

You may not understand it right now; but Jesus is always in the right place at the right time.

“. . .he departed to Galilee”. Galilee is a beautiful region north of Jerusalem. The province contained 204 villages with over 15,000 people (Augsburger; Courson). Others say the region around the Sea of Galilee (fresh water lake) had far more people. Some estimate in the millions (Bruner; MacArthur). "It was called the 'Region of Death' by the Jews in Jerusalem because throughout Israel's history, the Gentiles would constantly wage war in the area" (Courson p.79). Galilee had a reputation of being home to the misfits, the rejects, the outcasts. The people also had a reputation of being less sophisticated and even illiterate. Josephus (former Governor of the area) wrote that the Galileans "were fond of innovations and by nature disposed to change, and they delighted in seditions" (think Texas). In other words, they were rebels. They had a distinct

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accent (Matt.26:73). It became the place where Jesus would chose his closest disciples. Jesus did not go there out of fear of the local authorities. Jesus knew what the local authorities could do or not do. Jesus simply wanted to avoid premature conflict or confrontation.

Many people heard John gladly and believed John's message. But some rejected John. The same would be true in the ministry of Jesus and the same is true for us!

13And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali,

Jesus chose a beautiful beach town resort for his headquarters. Capernaum means 'village of Nahum' or the village of compassion. Jesus broke ties with his family, and friends to set up ministry in Capernaum but only after they rejected Him. Here Matthew has set up his tax franchise and Matthew will refer to this place as "His city".

The believer has every reason to trust God's leading and guidance in their lives. We live in Christ. We are led, guided, directed by God's Holy Spirit. We can trust that God will lead us to the right place in order to accomplish the right ministry.

Psalm 25:9; "The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way."

Psalm 48:14; "For this is God, Our God forever and ever; He will be our guide Even to death".

Isaiah 48:17; "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: I am the Lord your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go."

We serve the Lord. We seek His purpose for our lives. Within every generation God raises up one witness and then another and another to carry out the work of ministry.

14that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

15"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles:

Jesus made a deliberate decision of ministry location; based on prophecy.

Does it shock you or surprise you that Jesus chose to deliberately fulfill Scripture? The fulfillment of Scripture not only points to the critical role the Scripture plays; but the critical need to know the Scriptures, believe the Scriptures and obey the Scriptures.

Jesus does not attempt to fulfill the Scriptures to add credibility to an incredible ministry; but rather to remind the reader that the ministry of Jesus was predicted in the Scripture and fulfilled God's plan and God's purpose.

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Isaiah (9:1-2) predicted the Gentiles—ignorant of God's revelation would see a great light; that light was and is Jesus.

We Christians do not attempt to fulfill prophecy or artificially generate credibility by making up things or announcing things that have nothing to do with the Bible. We pay attention to the Scripture; attempt to know the Scripture and obey the Scripture.

Jesus said (John 15:3) "Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken to you".

John 17:17; "Sanctify the through you truth: your word is truth".

2 Timothy 3:16; "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness".

"Galilee of the Gentiles" is significant because Jesus is reaching out to a cross-stream of people. America has been called a great melting pot of people and Galilee of the Gentiles was a great melting pot; a cross section of the peoples from the Middle-East.

There was a famous trade route that was known as the way by the Sea. Galilee was on the way to everywhere. Syria was north. Phoenicia was west. This region was originally given by God to the tribes of Asher, Zebulon and Naphtali when Israel was sent in to possess the land. Zebulon and Naphtali failed to expel all the Canaanites from their territories. Mixed marriages and pagan practices made Galilee a Gentile haunt. In the 8th century BC the Assyrians under their pagan King took a large portion of the Israeli population captive and deported them. Other non-Jewish racial groups settled the area.

Because of this, Biblical and traditional Judaism suffered greatly. No wonder so many Jews were amazed at this rag-tag team of Galileans. God takes the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. Isaiah had predicted eight centuries earlier, the despised and sin darkened region of the uncouth and despised Galileans would be the first to glimpse the Messiah in action. It was not the proud, educated, sophisticated Rabbi's of Jerusalem. Hurting people, despised people, rejected people became the first mission field for Jesus. Think about it. The neediest people are the most likely to recognize their need. Jesus went to them first.

The Kingdom Mission (v.16)

16The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned."

What is the Kingdom mission? What is the ministry purpose tasked or assigned to Jesus? Jesus comes for people. His focus is on people. ***We are given the Kingdom mission: Jesus is the light. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:4-5). Should we be shocked or surprised that Jesus' mission includes ministry to those with the greatest need? Jesus said of Himself; "I am***

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the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). It the OT walking in the light was often used as a figure of speech to describe walking in righteousness before God and obedience to the revelation of His Word.

Jesus came to save sinners.

Jesus in Matthew 20:28 says; “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many”.

Luke 5:31-32; “And Jesus answered them and said to them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”

Luke 19:10; “For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost”.

Jesus will take people in darkness, in distress, in duress and offer them light and wholeness and wellness.

In at least one sense his mission is our mission. We take people and do what Christ did. We give them light. We give them hope. We give them Jesus. Light is present. We don't have to go looking for the light—Jesus is the light of the world. We can chose light—and walk away from darkness. The prophet pointed out that the people sat in darkness. People are comfortable with darkness. Jesus said “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doth evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deed should be reprov'd (exposed condemned). But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be made known, that they are wrought in God” (John 3:19-21).

People sit in the region of the shadow of death. The region (territory, country, area) of death—but right now death is only a shadow.

“You keep waiting for the moral of your life to become obvious, but it never does. Work, work, work: No moral. No plot. No eureka! Just production schedules and days. You might as well be living inside a photocopier. Your lives are all they're ever going to be.”

— Douglas Coupland, *Player One: What Is to Become of Us*

The Bible says no! Jesus says no! God loves this world. God gave the world his only begotten Son. We can believe in Jesus. We can have life and hope and forgiveness. Our lives matter. They have purpose. We exist to glorify God and have a real relationship with our Creator.

There is a moral to the story. There is a plot. There is a discovery. You don't live inside a photocopier. You can have life in Christ. You can have purpose in Christ. You can have hope in Christ.

The Kingdom Message (v.17)

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

We must not overlook the words "From that time". The expression is meant to convey urgency, persistence and perseverance. Why is this important? The phrase will be used again in Matthew's Gospel (16:21)—and mark a critical turning point in Matthew's narrative about the ministry of Jesus. This marks—the beginning of Jesus's earthly ministry—and 16:21; "From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day". Apparently that important piece of information was down played at the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry! The expression "from that time" gives us an important clue about Jesus and His mission and His message! Jesus preached repentance. The message is identical to John's message (3:2).

Repentance will be a reoccurring theme in the preaching of Jesus and will also be included in the closing admonition to his own disciples at the close of his ministry (Luke 24:44-48);

(v.46) "Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, (47) "and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (v.48) "And you are witnesses of these things."

Jesus expects the Gospel message would include repentance and remission of sins.

The Greek word translated 'preach' is "*kerusso*".

The word 'repent' means to turn, to change, to turn from sin and turn to God. The term repent invites the listener to consider just how serious a threat sin really is to the sinner.

Repentance always involves three things:

1. There is a change of mind. Our deep desire is to do good instead of evil.
2. There is a change of heart. Instead of loving sin we want our affections on those things that are godly, spiritual, edifying. The Psalmist wrote; "O how I love I thy law". This is not the slavish observance of the rules but a deep desire to make Jesus happy. The Lord gives us a new heart and new spirit. (Ezek. 18:31). We become partakers of the Divine Nature. And then it is God who works in us both to will and do his good pleasure (Phil.2:13).
3. There is a change of life. This change of life is the evidence that our repentance is real and true.

'Tis not enough to say,
I'm sorry and repent,

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And then go on from day to day
Just as we always went.
Repentance is to leave
The sins we loved before,
And show that we in earnest grieve
BY DOING THEM NO MORE.

The Lord Jesus also preaches 'the kingdom of heaven is at hand'.

Some suggest that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are the same. Paul spoke of the Kingdom of God as "peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17; 1Cor. 4:20; Col. 1:13). What does Jesus mean by 'the kingdom of heaven'? Does He mean the place where God rules? Later Jesus teaches the disciples to pray; "May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven." It would seem the Kingdom of Heaven is that place where God's will is done. The Kingdom of God is not a visible earthly kingdom. The Kingdom of God does have some kind of reality right now. The values of the Kingdom of Heaven often run counter to the values of this world or even our own expectations. (Matt. 13:11) "(Jesus) explained to them, 'You have been permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others have not.'"

Jesus in his parables explains what the kingdom is really like; as opposed to our expectations of it. The Kingdom of Heaven is not simply a geographic region but a spiritual realm where God rules and we share eternal life.

What part of His mission and His message are your mission and your message?

Conclusion

A Kingdom is coming. It will be revealed. Citizenship in that kingdom is our most valuable possession. God determines who will be in His Kingdom. Can we live in that Kingdom now?

We join the Kingdom when we trust Jesus as Savior.