

“How Do You Mend a Broken World?”
Matthew 4:12-25
November 19, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

How do you get started when the task lying before you is massive? We’ve all had experiences like that. Perhaps it’s the day after the movers have just unloaded all your goods from their truck into your house. Boxes and chaos reign supreme. Or maybe you had a water pipe burst while you were away, and you arrive home to find the water still running and three inches of water on your floor. When things are such a big mess, the tendency is to quit before you begin because the job is too big, the chaos too severe.

The passage before us today marks the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. John the Baptist served the role of Jesus’ forerunner, but he is now out of the picture due to his imprisonment by Herod. It would seem that his preparatory role is complete and it is time for Jesus to take center stage. How do you get started in the job of mending such a dark and broken world? This passage serves as something of an introduction to the ministry of Jesus, introducing us to the nature of that ministry. The things we learn from Jesus here are to be incorporated in our understanding of ministry as well.

I. Jesus’ Message

The opening stage of Jesus’ ministry is in an unexpected place. It wasn’t in the power center of the nation in Jerusalem and Judea, but in the remote and despised region of Galilee. After the imprisonment of John the Baptist, Jesus withdrew to Galilee, perhaps to avoid the increased risk involved by staying in Judea. But Matthew sees it as a fulfillment of a prophecy from Isaiah of the light dawning in the least expected place. Galilee is called “Galilee of the Gentiles” because it was at the northern border of Israel where many Gentiles lived. It was one of the least Jewish regions of Israel, and therefore looked down upon by many. The response of Nathaniel to Jesus’ origin in Nazareth of Galilee was typical. **“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”** (John 1:46). So it was just the kind of place Jesus wanted to go to, filled with pagans and backsliding Jews.

Jesus is the light of the world, and Galilee was a place of deep darkness. I love the wording in that praise song that says, “He wraps himself in Light, and darkness tries to hide and trembles at His voice.” Matthew slightly changes the quote from Isaiah, who wrote about those *walking* in darkness. But Matthew changes the verb to speak of people *sitting* in darkness. Matthew envisions such deep darkness that it immobilizes. You can’t even take one step because

of the complete darkness, so you just sit down. That is the state of the world Jesus entered, and that is also our condition apart from Jesus.

The light of Jesus breaks forth in the gospel message he proclaims, which is the same message proclaimed by John the Baptist. **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”** (3:2; 4:17). Jesus sets about to mend this dark and broken world, and what’s the first thing he does? He preaches. That’s the word used here, a word that is viewed far more positively in the Bible than in our common usage, which usually has a negative sense. We say, for example, “Don’t preach at me.” Or we criticize someone for being “too preachy.” Preaching is viewed in the Bible as a central part of God’s solution for what ails this world, not as a problem to be avoided. What is preaching? The word that is used here means to proclaim forth a public proclamation. So if the army of a nation went out to fight the invading army of another nation, and if the invading army was defeated in battle, the king would tell his herald to make a public announcement, to preach, the good news that their army had prevailed. A public proclamation could, in theory, be of bad news, but that is not the way it is used here and throughout the Bible. It is the proclamation of good news.

What is the good news Jesus proclaimed? **“The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** The kingdom of heaven was at hand because the king had come to set things right. The reign of God arrived with Jesus. It is a reign of justice and righteousness in which all evil will be removed. It is the return to the Garden of Eden and the removal of the curse upon the earth. It is a kingdom of peace and everlasting joy.

The first word in Jesus’ preaching, “repent,” is often viewed negatively, because it suggests to people that a change is needed. But there is also good news in this word. If the kingdom of heaven is coming when God will remove all evil from his world, then any in whom any evil is found must be removed. But there is an alternative for evildoers, found in this word. Upon repentance they can enjoy the benefits of this new kingdom. Their sins can be forgiven and their lives can be transformed. Notice that Jesus doesn’t say, “Repent *so that* the kingdom of heaven can come.” He says, “Repent, *for* the kingdom of heaven is near.” There is an inevitability to the coming kingdom. There is no force in the universe able to deny the king his rightful reign. Repentance does not bring about the kingdom, but it does allow God’s former enemies, sinners like you and me, to be citizens of this kingdom. That is the good news he announces.

Let me make one application about this. We do well to start where Jesus started in sharing the gospel to our friends and loved ones, and that is to start with the good news of what God has done. We don’t start with what we are to do but with what God has done. Through Jesus, God has reopened the path to paradise. Everything we were designed for can be restored through him. That means that we can affirm people’s deep desires in our evangelism, while at the same time challenging them to repent because it is only through Jesus that

those desires can be satisfied. But our starting point, as was the case with Jesus, is good news.

II. Jesus' Methods

Jesus didn't content himself with teaching, performing miracles, dying as our substitute and rising again. He did all those things, but one thing more that was essential. He established a church, consisting of his disciples and followers. People were an essential part of his method. The middle paragraph of our text reports on two sets of brothers Jesus called to be his followers. Peter and his brother Andrew were the first two mentioned, followed by James and John. These four were all fishermen, so Jesus' appeal to them reflected their occupation. **"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men"** (4:19). I think preachers have often made too much of that metaphor of being fishers of men, sometimes building an entire philosophy of evangelism on the analogy of fishing. Jesus spoke this way for the simple reason that all four of these men were fishermen. What he is inviting them into is a life that is able to influence others for the kingdom.

There is something deep within us all that wants to make a difference for the kingdom, that wants to be an influence for good. Life coaches will sometimes assign people the task of writing their own funeral eulogy. At the end of the day, we all want the same thing, to influence the lives of others for their good, to leave the world a better place because we've lived in it. That's what Jesus promises to these four that he calls to follow him. Notice that Jesus makes a promise to them: **"I will make you fishers of men."** He doesn't say, "Figure out how you can become fishers of men, develop a plan that will get you there and then follow that plan." I don't know about you, but one thing I know about myself is that I am not smart enough or wise enough to develop such a plan. Jesus knows that, and he also knows how to develop such a plan and promises to do so. He is doing that right now with each one of us.

But we do have a role to play in becoming a positive influence in the lives of others. **"Follow me,"** Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." To follow Jesus is to become his disciple. It means to make Jesus the object of your ultimate loyalty. To follow him means that we obey him and trust him. It means that we follow him even if he leads us into trials and suffering. I find that it is often in following Jesus into trials that he develops our ability to be influencers for the kingdom. My wife has a gift for knowing how to welcome people, and she has influenced for the kingdom of God hundreds of people through that gift. She will tell you, though, that a significant factor in the development of that gift was the fact that she was forced to go to three different high schools through moves her family made when she was a teenager.

Our need is to follow Jesus no matter where he takes us. Do you remember the Old Testament character named Ittai the Gittite? In case you don't, let me refresh your memory. According to 2 Samuel 15, he was a Philistine from Gath (the meaning of Gittite) who had come to serve King David. The timing of his arrival in Jerusalem was not good, because he arrived just before Absalom's attempted coup that forced David into exile. As David was fleeing Jerusalem with all his loyal followers, he stopped to look at those who were passing him by and spotted Ittai. David said to him, **"Why do you also go with us? Go back and stay with the king [Absalom], for you are a foreigner and also an exile from your home. ²⁰ You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, since I go I know not where? Go back and take your brothers with you, and may the LORD show steadfast love and faithfulness to you"** (2 Sam. 15:19-20). But Ittai insisted on staying with David, leaving the promise of safety with Absalom for a likely death with David. That's what it means for us to follow Jesus, too. We leave whatever we need to leave in order to stay with him. At times, that will involve suffering and trials. But at the end of the day, there are never regrets, because that path will always lead to life.

The second aspect of Jesus' method we see here is the importance of place. What I mean by that is that Jesus had an itinerant ministry, going to people rather than waiting on them to come to him. Matthew writes that Jesus went throughout "all Galilee" (4:23). Matthew seems to go out of his way to emphasize the importance of missions, and we see another example of that here. Remember that this region of Galilee is called "Galilee of the Gentiles." Jesus, in a sense, is going to the nations during the earliest stages of his ministry. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, so he goes where lost people can be found rather than expecting them to come to him. This is one of the reasons we want to be a missions-minded congregation. We are following Jesus into incarnational ministry.

The third method we see in Jesus' ministry in this passage is his blend of word ministry and deed ministry. A biblical philosophy of ministry requires giving emphasis both to word ministry and deed ministry. That's the way Matthew summarizes Jesus' ministry. He both taught and preached, as well as **"healing every disease and every affliction among the people"** (4:23). He both *told* people of the love of God through this good news and *showed* them that love through tangible acts of mercy. Wherever he saw brokenness that has come into the world through the fall of the human race into sin, he sought to reverse that. He is showing by these acts what the kingdom of heaven is like, the very kingdom he is preaching about.

We are to go about ministry in the same way Jesus did, both telling people of God's love through the proclamation of the gospel, and showing them that same love through deeds of mercy. Both are part of the good news of the kingdom. Neither one has priority over the other, any more than one wing of an

airplane has priority over the other. Just as both wings are required for an airplane to fly, both word and deed ministry are required for the good news of the kingdom.

I serve as a board member of a mission that does a good job balancing word and deed ministry. For example, one of our missionaries felt called of God to do something about women in a large city in India who were trapped in the sex trade. So he went both to tell them about Jesus, as well as help to release them from the bondage of the sex trade. He did so by starting a business near that red-light district, a bakery that employs more than a dozen of them. It is a holistic approach to ministry that patterns itself after the ministry of Jesus.

CONCLUSION:

How do you respond to the brokenness of this world? Many people, including many Christians, just want to complain about it. Jesus didn't complain about it, though he saw and experienced far more of its brokenness than you or I. He did two things that you and I can do too. He proclaimed the gospel and he loved people through tangible deeds. It takes faith to do both of those, because they seem so inadequate to the needs. Though he had supernatural healing abilities that you and I lack, Jesus shared in our limitations. He could only be in one place at one time. He healed people who got sick again, and all of them eventually died of something. He proclaimed the good news of the kingdom, and many didn't understand him, including all of his own disciples at first. They kept thinking he was going to establish a political kingdom in which they would all have positions of power. But he kept plugging away because he knew that these were the seemingly weak instruments God was going to use to bring about the kingdom of heaven.

God will do so again through the foolishness of preaching and through deeds of love and mercy. In my previous church, I still remember taking a young lady out on a visit to a family that had visited our church. I was seeking to train this young lady about how to share the gospel. This particular night, it was her turn to share for the first time, if God provided an opportunity to do so. God did, and she stumbled nervously through a presentation of the good news. She and I were both surprised at the response when she asked at the end if they wanted to receive God's gift of eternal life. "Yes, we really do."

There is also power in our deeds of love and mercy. One of the obstacles we all face in being faithful to this is that we are so limited and our efforts seem so small in comparison to the size of the need. But it has never been any different. Our efforts at deed ministry will always feel small and inadequate. And they really are, except for one thing. This is God's appointed means for bringing in his kingdom. So we labor on in faith. Ask God to open doors for you to share this good news and to show this good news in deeds of love and mercy.