

# JESUS SAYS, “COME, FOLLOW ME”

Matthew 4:12-25

Key Verse: 4:19

**“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”**

After Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist, he faced the devil’s temptations. Jesus defeated the devil with perfect love for God and reverence for the word of God. After three tries to make Jesus fall, the devil left. We learned that life is a spiritual war against the devil. We can have victory only in Jesus Christ.

Today’s passage introduces the ministry of Jesus Christ. Simply said, Jesus preached, called disciples and healed the sick. We will see variations of these ministries throughout Matthew’s gospel. Our prayer in studying Matthew’s gospel is to learn of Jesus more deeply and to grow as his disciples. Jesus also wants us to participate in his life and ministry as disciple-makers.

Whom do you follow? I did a google search on who has the most Twitter followers. The top seven were: Katy Perry, Justin Bieber, Barack Obama, Taylor Swift, Rihanna, Ellen DeGeneres and Lady Gaga. That means five were pop music stars, one was a TV show host and one a former president. It means that most young people are following rock stars. Have you looked at the lives of rock stars lately? Do you find anyone whom you would like to follow if your life and eternal destiny depended on it?

Whom you follow shows your life dream and aspiration. Whom you follow sets your life direction. Christians are called to follow Jesus Christ. Christians say, “I’m a follower of Jesus Christ.” If you can’t say that sincerely, then you are not a Christian. The word Christian actually means “one who belongs to Jesus Christ.” That means real Christians are those who can say, “I belong to Jesus Christ. Jesus is my Lord and Master.” We need to ask ourselves seriously, “Am I a true follower of Jesus Christ?” We need to examine our hearts and lives in light of today’s Bible passage. We will study today’s passage in 3 parts: Jesus brought the light of heaven, Jesus promised to expand his kingdom through people, and Jesus helped and healed people physically and spiritually.

**First, Jesus brought the light of heaven (12-17).** Look at verse 12. **“When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee.”** John was a great man of God, who told people to repent and turn to God. He was no hypocrite,

## JESUS SAYS, “COME, FOLLOW ME”

because he didn't just talk the talk, he walked the walk. He practiced what he preached. He proclaimed the word of God. And common people responded in droves to turn their lives around. People in positions of leadership however, didn't like John. His message made them look bad. His message challenged their lifestyles. His message landed him in prison. We have freedom of speech in the USA. You can't get arrested for preaching the gospel or simply telling people about Jesus or God. People in some other countries, such as strict Muslim nations, don't have that freedom. So, are you using this freedom? When is the last time you told someone or even asked them about God or Jesus Christ? I go inviting students to Bible study and church twice a week. The other day I went with a missionary and invited a girl student who identified herself as Jewish. Shamefully, I just said, “Ok,” and moved on. As I left, I thought I should've asked her one question: “What do you think about Jesus Christ, honestly?” May God help me to speak up more boldly and faithfully about Jesus Christ, not just try to be nice and avoid rejection. I pray the same for you.

What did Jesus do when he heard John was put in prison? He withdrew to Galilee. On the surface, it sounds like Jesus was running away from persecution. Or we might think that Jesus was so insensitive not to visit John in prison and encourage him. Then why did Jesus withdraw to Galilee? As we know, Jesus faithfully did and said what God wanted him to do and say. The Bible says that Jesus never sinned. Whatever he did and said was right, all the time.

Verses 13-16 explain that Jesus did this to fulfill Scripture, that is, to follow God's will and purpose for him. Let's look at these verses:

**<sup>13</sup> Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—<sup>14</sup> to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: <sup>15</sup>“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—<sup>16</sup> the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”**

This is a quotation of Isaiah 9:1-2. The prophet Isaiah lived over 700 years before Christ. But he foretold a great light that people living in darkness would see. On those living under death's shadow, a light would dawn. Isaiah even said where it would happen: in Galilee, by the sea. In Galilee there is a sea or lake called the

## JESUS SAYS, “COME, FOLLOW ME”

Sea of Galilee. Jesus grew up in Galilee in the town of Nazareth, which is not next to the sea. Jesus found direction in God’s word to move to the sea. So he moved to the town of Capernaum, by the lake (show a map).

In Matthew’s gospel, this is already the seventh explicit prophecy in the Old Testament fulfilled by events in Jesus’ life (1:23; 2:2,15,18,23; 3:3), in addition to many more implicit prophecies alluded to, such as in Jesus’ genealogy.

How is Jesus a great light to those in darkness and the shadow of death? What is the darkness and the shadow of death that envelopes people in the world? This darkness and death were not only in Jesus’ time. In every generation, all over the world, there are dark events caused by natural disasters, such as earthquakes, famines, and diseases. There are also deadly or depressing events caused by human corruption, oppression and injustice such as war, murder, torture, riots, terrorism, extortion, theft, manipulation, embezzlement, abuse, etc. Beautiful sunsets, mountain ranges and waterfalls cannot erase or eliminate the death and destruction we hear in every news report.

The world needs a greater light, the light of God from heaven. We yearn for the true justice and righteousness of God’s perfect rule. This great light is Jesus the Messiah, the King of heaven. Apostle John called Jesus **“the true light that gives light to everyone”** (Jn 1:9). Jesus himself said in John 8:12, **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”** Echoing the words of Matthew, St. Luke spoke of Jesus as **“the rising sun”** who came **“to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”** (Lk 1:78,79) Jesus is the great light, who defeats and drives out the darkness from human hearts. Jesus is the light who gives hope and direction to our lives. When you are feeling dark, when the world looks dark, say a prayer: Jesus, light of the world, shine on us, shine on me. Drive out the darkness with your great light.

What was Jesus’ message? Matthew records Jesus’ first public statement in verse 17. It reads: **“From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’”** Jesus spoke the very same words of John the Baptist. John’s message and ministry was one of repentance. To repent, as we already know, means to change your mind, to turn from sin and the world to God. It means to turn away from idols to the living and true God.

## JESUS SAYS, “COME, FOLLOW ME”

**“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”** With the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, the kingdom of heaven has indeed come very near. Jesus is the King. At his birth, Magi came a long distance to find and worship the King of the Jews. Matthew declared in 1:1 that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the son of David, and the son of Abraham. Jesus is the King of heaven. Americans generally don’t like the idea of someone ruling over us. We have a tendency to criticize our leaders, including and maybe especially our President. We might think we can live in an illusion of being our own Master and Lord. We may think we don’t need a King to be a subject in any kingdom. But in reality, we are too weak and ignorant to save ourselves. We cannot engineer our way to eternal life, even with genetic engineering. We need the King of heaven to rule us and guide us to eternal life. We need the One who defeated sin and death and the devil, and the One who continues to defeat the darkness in the world and in our hearts. We need Jesus Christ, the Messiah, to be our King. All who acknowledge and confess Jesus as King are citizens of his eternal, heavenly kingdom. Let’s confess and live out the truth: Jesus, you are our true King, and you are my King.

**Second, Jesus promised to expand his kingdom through people (18-22).** Jesus the Messiah could’ve done the work of the kingdom all by himself, for there is nothing he can’t do. But Jesus did not do the work alone. He called people to help him, to be a part of his kingdom work. He called normal people like you and me.

Let’s see verses 18-20. <sup>18</sup>**“As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.”** <sup>19</sup>**‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’** <sup>20</sup>**At once they left their nets and followed him.”**

Matthew introduces us to two brothers who were fishermen, Simon called Peter and Andrew. On this particular day, they were throwing their net into the lake. Probably they needed to catch fish so they could eat a meal, bring a meal home to their families, and, if they were fortunate, sell any leftovers at the market to have a little savings for milk and eggs from the local farmer or bread from the baker or clothes from the tailor.

Jesus’ first disciples were not educated men. They were working class men, like farmers, bakers and tailors. They didn’t have a college degree. Jesus didn’t

# JESUS SAYS, “COME, FOLLOW ME”

choose highly educated men to change the world. He chose hard-working men who could listen and watch, learn and obey.

Most likely this was not the first time that Jesus met them. Surely, they had heard Jesus’ preaching, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”** What is surprising however, is their willingness and readiness to follow Jesus. Jesus simply said, **“Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people,”** and they followed him at once. Jesus gave them a command and a promise. The command was, **“Come, follow me.”** The original Greek actually says, “Come, behind me,” or “Come, after me.” It meant, “Come with me, right now.”

If Jesus said these words to people today, I can predict what many people would say. Some would rudely say, “Go away, preacher!” Some would say more politely, “No thanks, but I appreciate the offer. I hope you can find some people. Some people really need it, let me tell you.” Being a country immersed in Christianity, I believe most Americans would not openly reject Jesus. They would say something like, “Give me one or two hours. Where can I find you, when I’m done here?” So many people think they would follow Jesus, but they need some time to really get ready. They might say: “After I finish college, then I’ll follow Jesus,” or, “After I get married,” or, “After I get a job,” “After I figure out what God really wants me to do,” “After I find the right church,” etc. In a word, people are quick to give excuses, why they can’t follow Jesus right now. These are very similar excuses that people make to not study the Bible, or go to church, or get involved in evangelism and discipleship.

How about you? Are you actively following Jesus Christ? What is the evidence? Are you in Bible studies and faithful to attending church? Do you pray daily? Those are basic duties and privileges of a follower of Jesus Christ.

How about the next level: discipleship. Do you read the Bible daily? Do you try to put it into practice? What commands of Jesus have you obeyed in the last week? What promises have you newly claimed?

How about the next level: evangelism. When is the last time you talked to someone about God or Jesus or the Bible? Did you invite someone to church recently? This week did you pray for someone and with someone outside of a church service? Do you trust God by giving sacrificially of your time and money?

## JESUS SAYS, “COME, FOLLOW ME”

In his book “Powerful Living,” Dr. Bill Bright, the late founder of Campus Crusade for Christ wrote, “The Christian who does not regularly share his faith will lose his ‘first love’ and ultimately the power and blessing of God” (p.113).

There are two more disciples that Matthew introduces to us in verses 21-22. **<sup>21</sup> “Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, <sup>22</sup> and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.”**

These two men were also brothers and they were also fishermen. In fact, these four men were fishing buddies. There are two differences with Jesus’ calling these two men. One difference was that they left their father in the boat. I assume that their father was also a fisherman and they learned the trade from him. In any case, it was a bit rude to leave their father to follow Jesus. But they did so. They put Jesus’ word ahead of their father’s opinion or will. They didn’t ask, “Hey, dad, is it ok if we follow Jesus?” One other difference is that they were not fishing yet. They were preparing their nets. While Peter and Andrew were doing something when Jesus called them, James and John were preparing to do something when Jesus called them. But they didn’t say, perhaps like many people would say today, “Well Jesus, that’s not what we were preparing or planning. Your call doesn’t match our plans. We can’t really change our plans now.”

What are your plans? Do you have any? Do they include Jesus or give room for Jesus to make some changes? James 4:13-15 warns us about making our own plans too firmly: **<sup>13</sup> “Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ <sup>14</sup> Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. <sup>15</sup> Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’”** Jesus is calling you and me to follow him today. Are we listening? Are we ready to do and say what Jesus wants us to do and say?

**Third, Jesus helped and healed people physically and spiritually (23-25).** In this part, Matthew introduces us to Jesus’ multi-faceted ministry, with an emphasis on his healing ministry. Look at verses 23-25.

## JESUS SAYS, “COME, FOLLOW ME”

**<sup>23</sup>“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. <sup>24</sup>News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. <sup>25</sup>Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.”**

Verse 23 is an introduction to the rest of Matthew’s gospel. Jesus’ ministry was a mixture of teaching, preaching and healing. Teaching and preaching are both word ministries. They require ears to hear. Teaching and preaching are similar but slightly different. Teaching is instructing to form or change the mind of the listener, or student. Preaching is a proclamation or declaration of a truth to impact the heart and will of a person. Healing included the physical healing from diseases as well as the spiritual deliverance from demons. Jesus’ ministry was holistic, since it was intended to reach every part of a person: their mind, heart, will, body and soul. When Jesus has all of us then we are truly his disciples. When Jesus has all of us, his Holy Spirit works in us to sanctify us and through us to bless and help and impact others’ lives.

As we move through Matthew’s gospel with Jesus, we will see more and more of his teaching, preaching and healing ministry, working together at the same time. His teaching will come in 5 major discourses that end with the words, **“After Jesus had finished saying these things...”** These 5 major discourses are as follows:

- (1) The Sermon on the Mount [Kingdom Life] (Ch.5-7)
- (2) Kingdom Mission (Ch.10)
- (3) Kingdom Parables (Ch.13)
- (4) Kingdom Community (Ch.18)
- (5) The King’s Return (Ch.24-25)

Beginning with the next Bible passage, we will study in six lessons Jesus’ most famous sermon, The Sermon on the Mount, to learn the core of Jesus’ teachings about life in his kingdom.

# JESUS SAYS, “COME, FOLLOW ME”

I want to go back to Jesus’ words: **“Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people.”**

**First of all, Jesus spoke in terms and a context that they could understand.**

They were fishermen. Jesus said in essence, “Follow me, and you will be able to use your fishing abilities for God’s kingdom, to change peoples’ lives.” To a police officer Jesus might say, “Follow me, and you will protect and save peoples’ souls.” To a medical doctor Jesus might say, “Follow me, and you will bring healing to peoples’ whole lives.” To a janitor Jesus might say, “Follow me, and you will clean peoples’ hearts and minds.” Your profession is probably not a full time minister or pastor. But when you follow Jesus, he will use you to reach and influence people for God’s kingdom. How does he want to work in and through you?

**Secondly, Jesus’ words, “Come, follow me” indicate that Jesus takes the lead and we are to listen, watch and imitate.**

We are to do as he does and to say as he says. Jesus promises those who follow him: **“I will send you out to fish for people.”** The main verb in Greek is “make,” that is, **“I will make you fishers of people.”** In other words it is what Jesus promises to do in us and through us when we follow him. Jesus’ single command to us is to follow Jesus. At no point are we to stop following Jesus and do our own thing. We must keep following Jesus, remembering his words and deeds and depending on him to say and do likewise. Jesus promises to work in us and through us as we follow him. Jesus says to us today and every day, **“Come, follow me.”**