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.”

The theme of Matthew’s gospel is the kingdom of heaven. While we study this gospel, we learn how Jesus brought the kingdom of heaven and why he himself became the kingdom of heaven. Today’s passage opens the first page of his ministry as the Messiah.

First, a light has dawned. (12-17) When Jesus started his ministry as the Messiah, after being tempted in the wilderness, he was in the middle of spiritual and political turmoil. John the Baptist lived in the desert and preached the baptism of repentance. Many people around the country came to John, confessed their sins, and were baptized. The popularity of John was sky high. But soon John was imprisoned. According to Matthew 14:3 John was imprisoned because he had rebuked King Herod who had taken Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. John said, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” Then Herod put John to prison to stop him. It was the day of injustice and violence. How did Jesus respond to John’s unjust imprisonment? Did he start a release campaign for John? Look at verse 12. “***When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee.***” Jesus was not involved in the political turmoil, but he withdrew to a remote place.

Look at verse 13. “***Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali***–” Capernaum is a small town located at the northside of the Sea of Galilee. It was the hometown of Matthew, and not far from Bethsaida, the hometown of Peter, Andrew, James and John. The meaning of the name Capernaum is the village of comfort. Jesus took Capernaum as the center of his messianic ministry. The presence of Jesus in Capernaum was a great surprise to Matthew. Matthew had watched Jesus carefully if he was the Promised Messiah whom God had promised in the Scripture and whom his people had waited for since Adam’s Fall. When Matthew made it sure about Jesus, he remembered how Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah. He said in verses 14-16. “***To fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles–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.***” The town of Capernaum belongs to the district of Naphtali. When Moses divided the land of Canaan to the twelve tribes of Israel, Zebulun and Naphtali were assigned near Galilee, which was not a popular territory compared to the southern Judah. More than this, Zebulun and Naphtali joined Northern Israel which rebelled against Solomon’s kingdom. Later they were invaded by Assyria and lost their spiritual and national purity as the people of God. So, the people of Judah despised those who lived in Zebulun and Naphtali and did not associate with them. For these reasons there was deep sorrow and darkness in the hearts of the people who lived in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali.

But, a great light appeared in this dark area. Matthew saw Jesus as a great light who appeared among the people who lived in darkness and those who lived in the land of the shadow of death. Matthew believed that the appearance of Jesus in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali was the fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1-2. In the previous chapter we learned that the presence of Jesus is heaven to us. The presence of Jesus itself became a great hope and comfort to those who were in darkness. Capernaum is the village of comfort. Jesus stayed in Capernaum as the God of comfort and God of hope. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, “***Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.***” Amen! Last Thursday two of my best friends in Christ, M David Kim in Indianapolis and M Joshua Hong in UIUC came to see me and pray with me. I was so comforted by their visit while we shared the word of God and prayed together. Their presence became a great comfort and encouragement to me. How much more the people who lived in the darkness were comforted by the presence of Jesus! The presence of Jesus was a great light for them. Amen!

Look at verse 17. “***From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.***” How did Jesus bring his kingdom to them? Jesus preached the message of repentance and the kingdom of heaven. Jesus brought the message of salvation. In fact, the people of the land didn’t hear the word of God since the last prophet Malachi who lived in 400 BC. Almost for four hundred years they did not hear the word of God. Jesus said that Man does not live on bread alone, but every word that comes from the mouth of God. But the people in the land of Galilee did not eat spiritual food for four hundred years. As the prophet Amos said that people are wandering here and there, not searching for water to drink or food to eat, but the word of God which comes from the mouth of God. (Am 8:11-12) Now Jesus began to preach the good news of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus’ words were like the living water for the thirsty souls and living bread for the hungry people.

Second, come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. (18-22) Jesus recruited his disciples not long after he started his messianic ministry. Look at verses 18-19. “***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. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.***” Jesus moved from Capernaum to Bethsaida. While walking along the lake Jesus found Simon Peter and his brother Andrew who were casting a net for fish. Jesus invited them saying, “*Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people*.” Here we learn about the purpose of Jesus’ calling. First of all Jesus called them to follow him. Second, Jesus called them to send them out to fish for people. In other words, Jesus called them to make them fishers of men.

Who are the fishers of men? What does ‘fish for people’ mean? Fishermen catch fish for money. Fishers of men catch people for salvation. In the Parable of the Net Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. (Mt 13:47-48) Jesus called Peter and Andrew to catch people for their salvation.

Why and how did Jesus’ calling become a blessing to Peter and Andrew? Why is God’s call a blessing to us? This is because they participated in the work of salvation as Jesus’ disciples. Peter and Andrew were ordinary fishermen in Galilee who worked hard to support their family. Peter’s hope might be a successful fisherman who becomes a president of the Galilee fishery association. But his dream was not his real hope and the purpose of his life. Without having any hope and direction he just worked day by day for survival. But after he followed Jesus, Peter became a great apostle and a teacher of teachers in human history. His destiny has changed since he followed Jesus. There is the largest cathedral in the world built by Michael Angelo in the Vatican City, Peter’s Cathedral, which was named after Simon Peter. Peter is honored as the first pope in the Catholic Church. What a glorious blessing to Peter’s life!

In the same way and reason Jesus called James son of Zebedee and his brother John. Look at verses 21-22. “***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, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him***.” Jesus called two more fishermen for his disciples. Here we learn something in Jesus’ calling. First of all Jesus calls everybody, from every place, and for everything. Jesus didn’t find his disciples from well-educated elite Pharisees or Sadducees, but from unschooled and poor fishermen. God’s call belongs to God’s divine sovereignty. So, everybody, even you and me, regardless of any human condition, God calls for his good purpose. Second, obedience is the first qualification for God’s call. Peter, Andrew, James, and John immediately followed Jesus. They were not hesitant to respond to God’s call, but left everything, their nets and father, and followed Jesus.

Following Jesus itself is heaven to them. While living together with Jesus, they saw the face of the Son of God. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being. (He 1:3) The disciples had the privilege to see God’s glory through Jesus and hear the message of God’s kingdom. We envy those who work in the White House because they see the president face to face more frequently than us. How much more blessed and privileged than others when his disciples lived together with Jesus! The invitation of Jesus into their lives itself is a blessing and a heaven to them. It doesn't really matter where we are and what kind of job we have and what kind of position we have in this world. What really matters is whether we follow Jesus and live with him or not. This is because the presence of Jesus determines our happiness and salvation.

We call outreach ‘fishing’. In one way or the other Jesus called each of us as fishers of men in this generation. Missionaries, evangelists, Bible teachers and those who invite people to Jesus Christ are fishers of men today. I pray for all of us to become successful fishers of men. I pray that God may send many fish from Wash U and other campuses when we go out with a net for catch.  Amen!

Third, Jesus healed many (23-25) Verses 23-25 shows us how Jesus became a great light and how he brought the kingdom of heaven to his people. Look at verse 23. “***Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people***.” Synagogue was the center of Jewish community. There Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of heaven. His words were like living water welling up to eternal life and a shower of blessing which ends the drought of their thirsty souls. Jesus also healed every disease and sickness among the people. Those who were touched by the hand of Jesus were healed. By healing the sick Jesus brought the kingdom of heaven to their town. What is the gospel to those who are sick? The gospel for those who are sick is the news for healing. The news of Jesus’ healing spread to all over Judea. Look at verses 24-25. “***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. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him***.” There was no SNS at that time. But the news about Jesus spread quickly over all Judea and Syria. There was no hospital like today at that time. So all kinds of sick people came to Jesus for healing. Jesus accepted all of them and healed them all. There was no disease which Jesus could not heal. There was no one who would not be healed by Jesus. In this way Jesus brought the kingdom of heaven to the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. By teaching the kingdom of heaven and healing the sick Jesus became a great light for them.

We have sick co-workers among us. I am one of them. The gospel to me now is the complete healing from all diseases. The gospel to sick people is the complete healing from their sickness and diseases. I pray that the healing presence of God may fill this room and reach all those who are sick today. Healing from sickness is not all for us. We need salvation for our soul. We need Jesus, who is our Lord and Savior. I pray that we all may see the kingdom of heaven coming to our hearts through the presence of Jesus and the power of his healing. Above all may God help all of us to become joyful fishers of men who participate in the work of salvation. Amen!