

Mt. 4:12-25

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Today we conclude our series
working our way through Matthew's gospel.
In the second half of Matthew 4,
We find the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.
John the Baptist prepared the way for the Lord by preaching repentance.
Then he baptised Jesus.
Then the devil tempted Jesus and Jesus withstood the temptation.
Those were events that prepared the way for Jesus' public ministry.
After today's passage,
We find the first main teaching block.
Three chapters of Jesus' preaching
that we call the Sermon on the Mount.
So today's passage slots in between
As an account of the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.
I don't know what your picture is of the environment
that Jesus did his public ministry in.
I used to sort of picture it as an idyllic country environment.
The birds are singing in the trees.
The farmers are sowing seed.
Everything is just rolling along as normal.
Then Jesus comes along and starts preaching.
And the crowds are intrigued by his preaching,
And everything is fine and dandy
until the religious leaders started to feel threatened.
And then you get a swift build up of tension
between Jesus and the Pharisees.
Well the last half of the picture is right.
But the first part might not have been quite so calm and idyllic.
Jesus had been down with John in Judea.
So when Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum,
It was likely to have been prompted by John's arrest.

Basically Jesus decided that he was too closely associated with John to be safe anymore, based where John had been ministering. So he moved up to Capernaum to keep Herod Antipas off his case. In verse 12, the word translated 'withdrew' is translated in other places 'escaped'.

You could read verse 12,

'When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison,
He escaped to Galilee.'

What I'm saying is,

The entire context of Jesus' ministry involved opposition. Opposition wasn't just something that flared up in the week before he was crucified.

From woe to go, Jesus was on the run.

Herod the Great tried to have him killed as a baby.

His son Herod Antipas executed John the Baptist and would likely have come after Jesus too, if he hadn't made himself scarce.

The story of Jesus' public ministry is a bit like an action thriller where the goodies stay just one step ahead of the baddies all the way to Calvary.

In that context the quote from Isaiah is illuminating.

"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."

When the Son of God stepped into this world,

The world that greeted him was a place of great spiritual darkness.

Jesus was confronted with hostility

from the moment he stepped into the world.

As Luke records the beginning of Jesus' public ministry,

He tells in Luke 4

of a sermon Jesus preached in the synagogue in Nazareth.

When he finished,

The people tried to throw him off a cliff.

Being the Son of God on earth is not safe.

But Jesus came into the darkness of this world to shine God's light.

God's solution to the darkness caused by human sin

Was to enter the darkness himself,
And to provide an alternative of the greatest contrast.
So how did Jesus do it?

“From that time on,

Jesus began to preach,

‘Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.’”

And there begins his public ministry.

Up to this point in Matthew everything is done to Jesus.

Mary bears him.

The magi worship him.

Herod tries to kill him.

Joseph takes him to Egypt.

Joseph takes him back from Egypt.

John baptises him.

The Holy Spirit leads him into the wilderness.

The devil tempts him.

But now, Jesus starts to do things.

And what is the first thing he does?

He calls four fishermen to follow him.

‘Come follow me,’ Jesus said,

‘And I will send you out to fish for people.’

This is a remarkable little incident.

And I think there are important principles for ministry to be learned.

First, Jesus has no period of time as a lone ranger.

When he began his public ministry,

The very first thing he did was to gather around him

A group that could be trained

to continue the ministry when he was gone.

Training others up for tasks of ministry is not something you begin

When you know that you are going to move on or retire.

The impulse to train others up

is not something that becomes a priority

when you can see the end in sight.

Building a team,
training others is something you do from the very beginning.
Take Cherida's role in running a playgroup at Holy Trinity.
Should she wait until she knows
that it's her last year running play group
To take a mum from the church who is part of play group,
And try to equip her with the skills and vision
to be a good playgroup leader?
No. Absolutely not.
The whole time she's running playgroup,
She has an eye out for people like Joyce and Hannah,
people to work alongside.
People who may take over the leadership of the playgroup
at some point in the future.
But if they never do,
God will use the skills they develop
for his harvest fields in another way.
We train people up to equip them to be useful in the kingdom.
We don't need to know every detail
of how their training would be useful to the kingdom
when we begin the training.
Or suppose I found a young man in our church
who I thought might have potential as a future minister.
Would I start to try to involve him in leadership in our church,
Train him in leading a home group and preaching?
Of course I would.
It might mean losing one of the keenest of your flock,
As down the track he would go to Bible College
and then get placements elsewhere.
But you would make that investment of time and energy gladly,
Because you are following the example of Jesus,
Who from day one of his public ministry collected a team to be trained.
Principle one – train from day one.

Principle number 2 – evangelism is at the heart of discipleship.

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

Being a fishing for people is about
drawing other people to become followers of Jesus.

Just like a fisherman catches fish from the sea –

The disciple of Jesus seeks to draw others to become disciples.

Jesus didn't say to Simon and Andrew, James and John,

Come and follow me

and I will give you deep insights into the Scriptures

That even the Scribes and Pharisees don't understand.

He did that,

The fishermen did come to understand the Scriptures

better than the professional scholars

but making a band of Bible Scholars was not Jesus' primary objective.

Jesus didn't say to Simon and Andrew, James and John,

Come and follow me and I will teach you

to live a holy life that conforms to God's plan.

He did that,

The fishermen came to exhibit a quality of godliness

that marked them out from those around them.

But making a religious community of monks with holy lives
was not Jesus' objective.

Jesus called his disciples to be fishers of men.

The heart of our calling is to reach out

to those who are estranged from God.

Evangelism is at the heart of discipleship.

You know, very often we divide things that God wants kept together.

Evangelism and discipleship are two of those things.

Churches that are larger than ours

and so able to run more fancy programs

Often have various streams of programs,

Some for evangelism and some for discipleship.

The evangelism programs are aimed at reaching out to outsiders.

The discipleship programs are aimed at educating and training insiders

To live out their Christian faith more fully.
In a sense, that's an entirely understandable breakdown of programs.
But notice that Jesus has only one program.
Jesus calls fishermen to be his disciples –
And he sends them out to fish for people.
Evangelism and Discipleship all rolled into the same package.
You can't have evangelism without discipleship –
And you can't have discipleship without evangelism.
What would happen if you tried to be a faithful disciple
without being involved in evangelism?
Well you might be able to work on the fruits of the Spirit –
Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,
goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.
There's a lifetimes work on those things –
You'd never be finished.
And at the end of the day,
You would have missed the number one priority
that Jesus has for disciples.
He wants us to fish for people.
You would have got so distracted by what is good
That you'd have missed what is most important.
You aren't much of a disciple if you miss the most important job.
What would happen if you tried to be a faithful evangelist
without concerning yourself with what we call discipleship?
Well you could slave your guts out
telling folk the good news about Jesus.
But when people looked at you,
And they didn't see much evidence
of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and the rest
They wouldn't be attracted
to become followers of the one you proclaim.
Using a rotten, smelly piece of meat on the end of a hook
might work quite well for fishing.
It doesn't work for being a fisher of men.
Evangelism and Discipleship are like

the engine and the chassis of the Christian life.
Have them together you will get somewhere.
Principle number 2 – evangelism is at the heart of discipleship.
Principle number 3 –
Jesus calls disciples to leave good things to follow him.
This is a scandal.
If you really understood what Jesus says here,
You'd probably walk out of church right now.
In verse 17,
Jesus' teaching is summed up in the sentence,
'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.'
Now we don't particularly like talk of repentance.
To our shame,
We wouldn't use the word repent outside of the church.
But at least we understand the point.
If you are one of those blokes who bashes his wife,
And you become a follower of Jesus,
Then you'd better stop.
Repent.
Start living Jesus' way.
If you are the kind of person who tells fibs,
Y'know embellishes the story to put yourself in a better light.
And you become a follower of Jesus,
You'd better repent.
Jesus calls his followers to turn from sin.
It's pretty clear and obvious.
But Jesus doesn't stop at calling people away from bad things.
Jesus calls people away from good things!
Simon and Andrew, James and John were not sinning
by fishing in lake Galilee.
When Jesus said, 'Come follow me',
They were actually engaged in a wholesome activity.
They were working in their family businesses.
They were getting food

so that those who bought their catch would have something to eat.
They were honest men,
Doing an honest day's work,
To earn an honest living.
And Jesus called them to leave it all behind.
James and John left their father Zebedee in the boat.
Zebedee had probably spent a decade or two
Training up James and John to take over the family business
when he became too old to fish.
He probably taught them how to mend a torn net the best way.
How to sail a boat in stormy weather.
How to find what part of the lake will be the best spot to fish in.
Years of training.
And they left it all behind without a second thought, to follow Jesus.
In those days there was no question about what job you would do.
You trained in the profession of your father.
And that was what you did.
In those days there was no old age pension.
If you survived after you were too old to work,
It was because your family cared for you.
Who was going to look after Zebedee
after James and John walked out on the family business?
Can you see the scandal contained in those words,
"Come, follow me."?
Jesus calls disciples to leave good things to follow him.
Remember the story of Mary and Martha.
Martha was praised because she left a good thing
To do a better thing.
Today Jesus calls disciples to leave good things to follow him.
My sister Kathryn was in Mexico where God called her to serve him
when our last two grandparents died.
She didn't get the same opportunities to say goodbye that I got.
She wasn't able to be at the funerals.
When my father had a heart attack.

Kathryn was not able to be at his bedside.
When we follow Jesus,
We don't only turn our back on bad things.
We actually have to say no to good things in order to follow Jesus.
Do you know
what the great untouchable idol is amongst Christians today?
I've probably given the answer away with my stories about my sister.
Family is the idol that is sacrosanct.
You can tell people to give their money.
You can tell people to give their time.
But if you suggest that they might say 'no' to a family responsibility
In order to follow Jesus,
You can tell that you've crossed an invisible line.
None may pass!
Does the saviour who hung and bled on the cross for you
Have the right to ask you to make some family sacrifices to follow him?
Too right he does.
And he didn't hesitate to ask James and John to follow,
Leaving their father Zebedee in the boat.
Now look.
I know as well as anyone that this is a complex area.
God calls us to be good members of our family
as part of following Jesus.
God wants me to be a dutiful and respectful son.
He wants me to be a loving husband.
He wants me to be a caring leader for my children.
So following Jesus doesn't always compete with our families.
I've not long returned from a week away with my family.
And I believe that I serve God
by giving Cherida and the children my full attention at such a time.
I've met ministers
who just about had to be introduced to their kids at their 18th birthdays,
because they were so wrapped up in serving God in their church

that they forgot about serving God in their family.
 It does happen.
 But let me tell you,
 The opposite mistake is far more common.
 Christian people who think that family always comes first.
 Family must come first sometimes.
 But if family always comes first,
 Family is an idol.
 Idols enslave.
 They don't provide freedom.
 Does the saviour who hung and bled on the cross for you
 Have the right to ask you to make some family sacrifices to follow him?
 Too right he does.
 And he didn't hesitate to ask James and John to follow,
 Leaving their father Zebedee in the boat.
 Three principles of Christian ministry
 Developed straight from Jesus' first action in public ministry.
 Principle number one – train from day one.
 If you have a role in serving Jesus,
 Bring others along and train them up.
 That doesn't mean you want to stop –
 It means you want the ministry to grow.
 Principle number 2 – evangelism is at the heart of discipleship
 If you want to be a follower without spreading the good news –
 You missed the point of being a follower.
 If you want to spread the good news
 without being serious about discipleship –
 Think about who won you to the Lord,
 And ask yourself this question,
 'Did their life attract you to Jesus or only their words?'
 Principle number 3 –
 Jesus calls disciples to leave good things to follow him.
 And yes that even means Jesus comes
 before the sacred cow of our families.