

*A burglar in the neighborhood was watching as a family loaded their suitcases into their car and departed. He waited until dark and then approached the front door and rang the bell. There was no answer, so the burglar picked the lock and let himself in. Roaming quietly in the dark through the living room, he used his dimly lit flashlight, looking for valuables, and when he picked up an item to place in his bag, a strange voice echoed from the dark saying, “Jesus is coming”.*

*He nearly jumped out of his skin, clicked off his flashlight and froze. When he heard nothing else, he shook his head, promised himself a vacation after this, then clicked the flashlight back on and began searching for more valuables. Just as he pulled the stereo system out so he could disconnect the wires, clear as a bell he heard, “Jesus is coming”. Totally rattled, he shone his light around frantically, looking for the source of the voice.*

*Finally, in the corner of the living room, his flashlight beam came to rest on a caged parrot.*

*“Did you say that?” He asked the parrot.*

*“Yes” the parrot confessed, then squawked, “I’m just trying to warn you.”*

*The burglar relaxed and said, “Warn me. Who do you think you are anyway?”*

*“Moses” replied the parrot.*

*“Moses” the burglar laughed. “What kind of people would name a parrot ‘Moses’?”*

*The parrot answered: “The same kind of people that would name a Rottweiler ‘Jesus’!”*

Well, the Jesus we know is coming – He’s coming again – He’s come before, and when Jesus came before, He came to when to a people who were in the dark, to a people in the shadows, and He came to shine a bright light upon them.

If you recall from last week, for 40 days and 40 nights, Jesus was tantalized by Satan with finely-tuned, tailor-made temptations just for Him. Jesus was tempted to sin just like us, and without using His divine power – in humility as a mere man, He was victorious over Satan – sinless – proving that He and He alone was qualified to fulfill the work that the Father had given Him to do – the work of providing salvation to a people who were lost in the dark.

Last week, we finished with **Matthew 4:11** where Jesus told Satan to “Go” and afterwards the angels came and ministered to Him. Now, we come to **verse 12**, and before we go there, I need to explain something.

Although we are not told by Matthew, and you would not realize it by looking at it, there seems to be a gap in time between these two verses – as much as a 12-month gap, and what that means is that many of the things which occurred during the early part of the Lord’s ministry were not recorded in this gospel.

For example, Matthew passes over the wedding in Cana where Jesus turned water into wine. He does not mention the first time that Jesus drove out of the moneychangers from the temple, and he does not tell us about the talk Jesus had with Nicodemus at night over the fact that you must be born again. Matthew also passes over the encounter that Jesus had with the woman at the well. All these things happened during the early part of the Lord’s ministry. **John** recorded all these things in his gospel, but they were not included by **Matthew**, and I think there’s a good reason for it, and I will explain it in a moment.

So, with all that said, being mindful of this gap in time, we can pick up where we left off beginning with **verse 12**, where Matthew tells us:

**<sup>12</sup> Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; <sup>13</sup> and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.**

In this passage, we are told that Jesus learns of the arrest of John the Baptist, and later on Matthew will explain that Herod Antipus, the ruler of Galilee, had taken the wife of his brother Philip, and John unloaded on Herod, telling him that what he did was totally immoral. Well, John was tossed into prison – but more importantly, it marked the end of his ministry, and the beginning of a new phase in the Lord’s ministry.

We are told that Jesus departs the region of Judea. He leaves Nazareth – His hometown because of their unbelief, and He settles in **Capernaum** – a bustling city along the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, and this is where Jesus will spend the most of His time – it becomes His home base if you will, and it just so happens to be the stomping grounds of Peter, Andrew, James and John, and it’s also the place where Jesus will later find Matthew.

You see, Capernaum was on a major international trade route that ran all the way from Egypt in the south through Syria and on to Mesopotamia in the north – a lot of people and a lot of money moved through there, and it was an ideal place for a tax collector.

If you remember, Matthew collected taxes for Rome, and when Jesus comes into the area, Matthew – who seems to know who comes and goes – it’s his business to know the business of others – it’s part of his job – he learns about Jesus and maybe he has the opportunity to hear Jesus teach and preach, and I think this is why Matthew begins here with the Lord’s public ministry. It’s here, in Capernaum, that Matthew first learns about Jesus, is later introduced to Him, and will eventually follow Him.

Now, as we continue beginning with **verse 14**, Matthew quotes from the Old Testament, and he writes,

**<sup>14</sup> This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:**

**<sup>15</sup> “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,  
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—**

**<sup>16</sup> “The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light,  
And those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death,  
Upon them a Light dawned.”**

Matthew quotes this passage from **Isaiah 9**, and this says something else about him. Even though Matthew is a hated tax collector – a Jew considered a traitor by his own people – the scum of the earth, it would appear he knows the Old Testament Scripture, because he quotes Scripture more than any other gospel writer, and also remember that Matthew is writing his gospel for the Jews. For years he has taken from his people, and now he is giving the truth back to them.

So, using this passage from **Isaiah**, Matthew seems to connect the dots so to speak, and sees the fulfillment of this Old Testament prophecy in the person of Jesus – another proof that He is the King and Messiah, and let me explain.

In the north, far from the center of religious power and influence in Jerusalem, Jesus goes up to the outcasts in **Zebulun** and **Naphtali** – the region called “**Galilee of the Gentiles**” because Gentiles were always passing through there, many settled there, and the general population was a people of mixed races who were despised by the Jews – but as the Messiah, Jesus goes to these people – to a people sitting in the dark, to a people in the shadow of death, to shine a Light upon them so they might hear and respond.

The “*cool*” Jews went to Jerusalem, but Jesus goes up north to where the *losers* were and He picks up right where John the Baptist left off. In **verse 17**, we are told:

**<sup>17</sup> From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

So, Jesus preaches the same message as John the Baptist. The kingdom of heaven – the kingdom of God is at hand because the King is closer to you than you could ever imagine. John preached about the coming King, but Jesus is the King, and like John, Jesus says to those who would hear – **repent**. The people had been thinking wrongly about God, thinking wrongly about themselves, thinking wrongly about righteousness, thinking wrongly about God’s will, thinking wrongly about sin, and the kind of repentance being commanded here by Jesus involved a *change of mind*, for when the mind is changed, a *change of life* will follow.

Repent – change your mind, change your life, for the King is in your midst. And speaking of change, beginning with **verse 18**, Matthew tells us about the calling of the first few men to follow Jesus. He says,

**<sup>18</sup> Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> And He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” <sup>20</sup> Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. <sup>21</sup> Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. <sup>22</sup> Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.**

**If this is all you knew, what would you think?** *This is crazy. A complete stranger comes up and says “follow me” so Peter and Andrew just stop working and leave everything. And then, the brothers James and John leave their father in the boat with the hired hands. Who really does that?*

At first glance, it sounds like Jesus was a stranger to these guys, but that was not the case. In John’s gospel, maybe a year earlier, we are told that **Andrew** and most likely **John** were disciples of John the Baptist who encouraged them to follow Jesus. Then later, Andrew introduced his brother **Peter** to Jesus, presumably John told his brother **James**, and also both Philip and Nathanael were included in the mix – just following Jesus around here and there, spending time with Him, and getting to know Him. So, they already knew Jesus to some degree, they had followed Him, they had come to trust Him, but eventually they returned to their livelihood of fishing – they did this on occasion – in fact, after Jesus was resurrected, they would return to what they knew – the fishing business.

So, Jesus shows up, He seems to be by Himself here, and we are told, that He sees Peter and Andrew casting a net into the water – and I picture one of those small weighted circular nets that a person can throw.

Anyway, Jesus who is preaching throughout Galilee, says to Peter and Andrew, **“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”** Now, they had been following Jesus already, at least part time, but this invitation was something different – *“Guys, if you follow Me, I’m going to be changing you in many ways. At the moment, you are catching fish, but I will cause you to catch men.”*

This was a progressive call – not just following Him around, off and on, like they’ve been doing, but a call to a greater commitment, a call for change, a call to really follow Him and to fish just like Jesus does – to fish for men.

*There is story about a man who was a phenomenal fisherman. He was so good that his fame spread far and wide. When everyone else was catching two or three fish a day, he would come back with two or three hundred. Eventually, the local game warden decided to investigate because it just sounded too good to be true.*

*On a certain day, the game warden showed up at the man’s door, identified himself, and asked to go fishing with him. The man was agreeable to that and off they went to the lake. When they got into the boat, immediately the warden noticed that something didn’t seem right. The man didn’t have any fishing poles or bait. He didn’t even have a tackle box. All he had was a small duffel bag.*

*So off they went, chatting about this and that until the man maneuvered the boat to the middle of the lake. Without a word, he turned off the motor, reached into the duffel bag and pulled out what looked like a stick of dynamite. Before the warden could say anything, he lit it and threw it into the water. It exploded with a mighty roar and stunned fish by the dozens floated to the surface. The man calmly started his boat and began gathering the fish in his net.*

*The warden said, “Now see here. This is highly illegal.” But the man just laughed and steered the boat to another part of the lake. He did the same thing with a second stick of dynamite and sure enough more fish floated to the surface.*

*By this time the warden had seen enough. He said, “Mister, you’ve broken so many laws I can’t even begin to count them.” The man just laughed and pulled out another stick of dynamite. The warden kept on talking. “This is an illegal possession of dynamite and an illegal detonation of dangerous material and disturbing the peace and about a half-dozen other misdemeanors and felonies.”*

*While the warden was talking, the man calmly lit the stick of dynamite and handed it to the game warden. As he did, he asked him the question fishermen always asked, "Are you going to talk or are you going to fish?"*

There's a point in this that I want to make. When it comes to sharing our faith, we do a lot of talking about it, but not enough fishing. **Are you going to talk or are you going to fish?**

So, Peter and Andrew follow Jesus, and as they walk a little further along the shore, Jesus sees their business partners – two other brothers named **James and John**. They are in a boat with their father mending their nets. Jesus called to them – they too knew Jesus – in the past they had listened to Him, as time permitted, they had followed Him, and here, just as it was for Peter and Andrew – there is a calling that involved change and a greater commitment.

Off they all go, with Jesus leading the way, and that brings us to **verse 23**.

**<sup>23</sup> Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. <sup>24</sup> The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. <sup>25</sup> Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.**

In this passage, Jesus and His disciples are making their way through a circuit of cities – a circuit that covers about a 100-mile radius, meaning as news spread about Jesus, simply by word of mouth, people are literally walking hundreds of miles to see Him.

We are told that Jesus was teaching and preaching – that was His primary ministry – teaching and preaching. Here's Jesus walking into the lives of thousands of people who were in the dark, people in the shadow of death, people with all manner of issues and problems – thousands of people from all over the place – thousands, who were nothing like Jesus but still they wanted to be around Him – and even better yet, Jesus wanted to be around them.

They were flocking to Him by the thousands. By word of mouth – that's all, from far and wide, people were hearing about Jesus and they're coming from all of the place just to see Him, to hear Him speak, and in some cases to be healed by Him.

**Can you picture it?** You got Jews rubbing shoulders with Gentiles in the presence of Jesus. You got the clean and the unclean in the same space. All of these people in the darkness, in the same shadows, are seeing this one great Light. He is teaching and preaching and healing, making known that the kingdom of heaven is present because the King is much closer than they might think, in fact, He's right there in their midst.

I can't even imagine what the disciples were experiencing. They were once just like everyone else – just people in the crowd, but now they are following Jesus – no longer in the *audience*, but now, somehow – *participants*.

Jesus said, **“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”** **Did you catch that?** Jesus said, *“I will make you.”* That's what He does. That's His part, and our part is to simply follow Him where ever He leads – even in the dark.

*A young woman met with her pastor and she said, “I cannot stick it out any longer. I am the only Christian in the place where I work. I get nothing but jokes, harassment, and sneers. It's more than I can stand. I'm going to quit.”*

*The pastor, in reply, then asked her, “Will you tell me where lights are placed?”*

*“What has that to do with anything?” the young Christian asked.*

*“Never mind that,” the pastor said. “Just answer my question: where are lights placed?”*

*“I suppose in dark places,” she said.*

*“Yes, you are right, and that's why you have been put in that place where there's such spiritual darkness and where there's no other Christian to shine for the Lord.”*

*The young Christian realized for the first time the opportunity that was given to her, and she went back to her work place with the renewed determination to let the Light of Jesus Christ shine through her in that dark place.*

Jesus said, **“Follow Me”** – even in the dark, it was an invitation to His disciples, and it's an invitation to us just as well.

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