

Following The King' – 9 Matthew Chapter 4vv12-25

At first glance these vv in Matthew 4 may not seem the most rivetting in the gospels. '*Jesus begins to preach*' and we get just one line of a sermon. '*Jesus calls his first disciples*' – and we read how four fishermen make a career move. '*Jesus heals the sick*' – a kind of general summary, without reference to anyone specific.

But as we reach the ninth in our series '*Following the King*' & our journey through Gospel of Matthew, I would say that these vv12-25 are very significant in Matthew's whole scheme of his gospel.

And when Ian asked if I was 'available for work' today, gave me the option of taking one, two or three of these sections from 12-25. Decided on all three sections – not just because all preachers think in terms of three points, but because there ARE three points here in these verses. And they are inter-related and all very crucial to what Matthew wants to get across to his readers about '***Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David***' 1v1.

So three sections and three points taken separately with a pause between each for song & next reading. **POINT 1:**
KINGDOM COME (vv12-17)

In the first part of Ch4 Jesus has been wrestling, mentally & spiritually, as to exactly how to begin & continue his public ministry. He has resisted the '*junk food of a spiritual high*' (Michael Green). He has rejected all outward shows of power for power's sake, and he has refused to compromise his commitment to his heavenly Father.

Now is the time to go public with God's word & in God's way. Jesus goes to live in Capernaum, by the shores of Sea of Galilee. Again Matt is quick to point out another fulfilment of Scripture (recurring theme in Matt) **QUOTE v15**...John the Baptist has prepared the way, but is now removed from the scene.

Think of a Shakespeare play when all supporting characters are off stage & centre stage is the central character...Or a pacemaker in a race drops out so that leading athlete can come to the front.

So comes Jesus – and the people living in darkness will now be brought into the great light of the King & coming of his Kingdom i.e. his Kingly rule. Here is the one who will call people out of darkness into his wonderful light (**1 Peter 2v9**). Here is the light that will shine in the darkness & the darkness will not put it out (**John 1v5**).

And then in **v17** (end of 1st section) we read this; ***From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'*** Just a one line sermon – or one line from a sermon. Maybe 21st century preachers should try that in our high-speed, hi-tech, short sound bite culture? I was once told that all good sermons should contain one main point that the congregation could take away with them. Something that my wife often reminded me of during my years in full-time ministry!

Well- here's your one line, one message, one point for this morning, folks - ***'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'*** I could try that out at Speakers' Corner by Minster Pool on the way home, I suppose – suspect I would not get much response – or the wrong kind of response, even from the good burgers of Lichfield!

There are, no doubt, some zealous evangelists on this Lord's day, who will parade the streets with the banner that says *'Repent – for the end of the world is nigh'* – figures of fun for many maybe and using an outdated method of evangelism in the 21st century. But the core of that message is still the essence of the gospel – ***'Repent'*** as Jesus proclaims here. The Greek word suggests the work of a herald in a city – involving a bold, clear & challenging message. 'Repent' means a complete change of mind & direction in life – a turning from the old & a turning to the new.

Today more than ever, there is a need for bold, clear, challenging sermons that transcend the speaker, but which arrest the hearers with the authoritative call of God. 3

And **KINGDOM CALL** = point 2..

2nd READING – Matthew vv18-22 - 'KINGDOM CALL'

On our dining room wall framed picture of sunrise over Sea of Galilee – a print from slide (150!) taken during a Holy Land pilgrimage back in 1990s. And it was standing on shore of Sea of Galilee that, for me, was the most poignant & spiritually moving. Not the many churches, not the site of crucifixion & resurrection, not the city of Jerusalem itself – all of them gave me & fellow pilgrims some special moments. But it was Sea of Galilee early morning that I almost sensed the Lord standing next to me.

Matthew does not record the actual time of day when Jesus calls his first disciples '**beside the Sea of Galilee**'- time of day ('*chronos*' in Gk) is not important, but this was those fishermen's time ('*kairos*') – i.e. the most significant moment in their lives.

'**Come, follow me**' – that's the KINGDOM CALL. Those fishermen will already have come into contact with Jesus via John the Baptist (see opening of John's gospel), so not entirely surprising that they 'at once left their nets and followed him.'

There is both a sense of urgency and of authority here – '**COME, follow me**' i.e. now & so '**immediately**' they respond to this authoritative Kingdom Call.

Life was never to be the same for them – nor is it for anyone who responds to this call. Those newly recruited disciples could not have possibly imagined what lay in store for them – from the glimpse of divine glory on Mt of Transfiguration to the agony of Gethsemane & Golgotha & on to the joy of Easter Day & anointing by H/S at Pentecost that would transform them into bold apostles for Christ.

These men were to travel far beyond their native lands with the message of salvation & in the end, become martyrs to the Christian cause.

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Peter would write many years later that they would have to suffer many kinds of trials, but would also be filled with an ***'inexpressible and glorious joy'***.

Jesus says (John's Gospel) ***'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'***

'Follow Me' small truck at airports just after you've landed..

We cannot follow unless someone leads that's why we come here week by week, responding to that call. And we will have heard that call in many & various ways – for some here perhaps many years ago – but you're still here this morning, still following that call - the call of the King. For others, call may be more recent & for some today who come to this sanctuary, this holy place, they have yet to respond to that insistent, authoritative & urgent call.

Sometimes the call is to do what fishermen do here – leave their current workplace & follow (cf. My leaving D/H aged 40 to go into ministry – *'life really does begin at 40 for you, Nick'*). But however, whenever & wherever this call comes, it is the same call – the conditions are the same, the urgency is the same & the promise is the same ***'I will make you fishers of men'*** (Gk. = ***'anthropon'*** = ***'people'***) it is an inclusive call.

And to follow is to go the same way as the leader & that way means the way of the cross – some, many here today will look back along the way that Jesus has led them & know the truth & reality of that.

Recent visit with twin grandchildren to 'Plantasia' near Atherstone – featuring seven different mazes. Our 3rd visit & our granddaughter (aged 5) was determined to be the leader & take us through the various mazes. But we kept on having to ask her to

slow down, for fear of losing sight of her – so that she & we might get hopelessly lost!

To follow someone you have to keep them in view, go at their pace & walk in their steps. Above all, you have to believe that they know where they are going.

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3rd READING: Matthew 4 vv23-25 – 'KINGDOM CONTENT'

So what does it mean to be involved & a part of the 'Kingdom of heaven,' part of God's Kingly rule? Here in these final vv of ch4, Matthew spells it out – he gives us the evidence that **'the kingdom of heaven has come near'** to use Jesus' words from v17.

The province of Galilee was not large, only fifty miles by twenty five, but it was such a fertile area that it supported a large population. Josephus, who was once its governor, tells us that there were no less than 204 villages in the province, none of them with less than 15000 inhabitants. So Jesus begins his public ministry in the most densely populated area he could have found in the entire Middle East at that time.

And Galilee was 'up north' in terms of Palestine at that time. Often despised by the more affluent & pukka Jews down south in Jerusalem. But it is here that Jesus chooses to begin his ministry. ***God chose the lowly things of this world & the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are – 1 Cor.1 v28.***

Into this less than trendy, less 'smart' part of the country does Jesus come teaching in the synagogues (plenty of those), proclaiming (that word again – herald announcing news that needed to be listened to) the good news of the kingdom. And the news about Jesus spreads – this was first century 'Twitter' -i.e. word of mouth passed on from town to town, village to village.

But it is not just in words that we see evidence of the coming of the kingdom of heaven, we read here also of actions – and what actions **QUOTE v24...**

'Preaching, teaching, & healing' v23ff– are the three elements that make up the content of the Kingdom - of what it means to follow the King. For those who follow this King respond to his message of repentance & faith.

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There is no greater moment in Christian ministry than when you stand with the candidate in the Baptistry immediately prior to act of Baptism & ask him/her to profess their faith in Christ..

There no greater privilege in Ministry than standing at lectern and preaching the word of God.

There is no greater responsibility in ministry than teaching the people the things of Christ day by day, week in & week out so that the **people of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3 v17)** -in the face of all that the world throws at them.

And there is no greater joy in ministry than seeing men & women's lives, young & old changed, transformed & yes, healed by the power of God at work in their lives.

Here in Matt 4 we read of such lives healed & transformed – but let us not confine such events & such possibilities & potential to the pages of this book & to 1st century Palestine. If we believe that Jesus is the same **'yesterday, today & forever' (Heb13)** then so is his message we read of here. Healing of mind, body & spirit ...

And it is that transformation that was & is noticed -words are not enough. KINGDOM COME yes, KINGDOM CALL, yes - but KINGDOM CONTENT must be evidenced if 'them out there' are going to take any notice of us & our message at all.

'Torch relay' caught the imagination of UK population this summer. Lighting of the Olympic flame from many flames in the stadium was a powerful moment in the opening ceremony. And equally moving the extinguishing of flames at closing ceremony – another 'teary moment' amongst many (for me anyway!).

But the 'Gospel torch' is not extinguished...Down to us to communicate **Kingdom Come** > to herald **Kingdom Call** > & above all to live it out in lives that show to Lichfield & the world **Kingdom Content** too. **'Waiting'** involved, often hard - **SONG...7**