

Matthew 4: 12-25

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[0 : 00] Our Bible reading is from Matthew chapter 4 and I'll be starting to read at verse 12. And that's on page 968 in the church Bibles.

Matthew chapter 4 starting at verse 12. When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee.

Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali, 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. From that time on, Jesus began to preach.

[1 : 07] Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. 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.

At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John.

They were in a boat, and their father Zebedee preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and illness among the people.

[2 : 11] 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. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks, Simon. Great. Thanks, Ruth. Thanks, Simon, for leading. Good morning, St. Silas.

How are you all this morning? Good morning. Brilliant. Excellent. A big warm welcome to you all. I'm James. I'm on the staff team here. And if you're here for the very first time and you're a bit nervous, you're in the right place.

So be confident there. Do chat to me afterwards. I'd love to chat to you and find out a bit more about your story and where you're coming from today. If you've joined us, as Simon has said, we're starting a new series in Matthew's Gospel, looking at that great sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, that lots of us know so well, chapters 5 to 7.

[3 : 27] But this morning, we're going to look at the start of Jesus' ministry and the verses just before that section. And if we're going to hear from God, then we must ask God for his help.

So let me pray as we begin. Loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for Jesus. We thank you that he has come as a light in the darkness to dispel the darkness.

We thank you that he has come as the fulfillment of your word and promises to us. Please help us to draw near to him now by listening to his word and growing in love and adoration of him.

Amen. Well, I wonder how you feel about the dark. Maybe you are someone who's a bit skittish about the dark and you've got a nightlight, even though you're 95 years old.

Maybe you are someone who's enjoyed camping and you've gone out into the foothills and into the Munroes of Scotland and the moon has disappeared.

[4 : 34] It's been a night when there's no moon and it's pitch black and you can barely see anything. How do you feel about the dark? Does it scare you?

Does it promote weird feelings in you? Are you ambivalent about it? How do you feel about the dark? And as Jesus starts his ministry in Matthew's gospel, the big metaphor or illustration or picture that Matthew uses to tell us what it's going to look like for Jesus to come into the world is as a light coming into darkness.

And the darkness there that he's talking about isn't simply no light, an absence of light, but it's a picture of a world that is dark, that is spiritually dark, and a world in which God is absent.

And there's lots wrong in our world today. And Robbie brought that out for us as he prayed. And so just if you've got a Bible open, please keep your Bible open.

That will be enormously helpful if you're watching at home, Bible Gateway, or if you grab your physical Bible, that would be great. But just notice the references to spiritual darkness in this passage.

[5 : 51] So firstly, notice all the pictures of the sea or the lake. Everything happens around the lake at the start of this passage. There's four references. And the sea, in the Bible terms, is a place of wildness, of wickedness, of scariness, of darkness.

And then notice where Jesus starts his ministry. He starts his ministry in Zebulun and Naphtali. And that's right at the north of Israel, modern-day Israel today, the promised land in Jesus' day.

And that's the area where all God's people had fled away from because it was the wild country. It's like the borders of Scotland, but in Israel terms. Because that's the way that all the Assyrians, whenever they wanted to invade Israel, they would come through the north.

And so those lands were always empty. And all the people who followed God had left those lands. God was absent in those lands. No one was there. And then finally, just look how our passage starts in verse 12.

John, the great prophet, the last, the person who speaks for God, speaks God's words. Well, where is he? He's in prison.

[7 : 03] God's word has been shut up. It's been silenced. It's been rejected by the authorities. And into this world filled with darkness in which God is absent, Matthew describes Jesus as coming as a light and beginning his ministry.

And so the big idea, the message that we should leave here, exit interviews, if we leave walking out the door tonight, this morning, is that Jesus comes as a light, as God with authority to fulfill God's plan to rescue the world.

Jesus comes as a light, as God with authority to fulfill God's plan to rescue the world. The points that we're going to go through there very quickly, we've got four points there.

Jesus comes as a light in the darkness, verse 12 to 17, if you're a note taker. Then Jesus calls us on mission in verses 18 to 22. And then Jesus comes to heal. And we'll see Jesus' authority over sickness and what that is, a picture of something bigger, verse 23 to 24.

And then finally, Jesus comes for all people. So today, we're lots of different sorts of people in here. Jesus comes for all of us. So our first point there, Jesus comes as a light in the darkness, verse 12 to 17.

[8 : 18] And the key verse there is that verse from Isaiah 9, which we know so well. Maybe you had a bit of deja vu if you heard that. That's that verse that we always read at Christmas.

If you go to Christmas carols, you would have heard it every year. So we'll just read it. The people living in darkness, verse 16, have seen a great light.

And those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. And the thing that Matthew wants us to understand is that it's not an expected Jesus coming.

He comes as the fulfillment of God's plan, verse 14, to fulfill what has been said through the prophet Isaiah. His coming is the thing that God's people have been waiting for, for 800 years.

When will he come? When will the light come? And chase away the darkness. And he fulfills that plan. And just notice the darkness was very real.

[9 : 19] It was not a metaphorical darkness. It was a real darkness to them. They were living in the shadow of the... They're living in the land of the shadow of death.

Death was imminent and real. The Assyrians were coming. The world was... Everything was going wrong around them. And then perhaps more accurately, thinking of Isaiah, he's living in the shadow of a spiritual death, of living a life outside of God, of not knowing him.

God's word's been absent for 400 years by the time Jesus comes to the world. And into this darkness, Jesus comes as a light, as God with authority, to fulfill God's plan to rescue the world.

Well, I wonder, younger guys here, have you heard the artist Drake? Yes? No? Not? No? He's really big. And one of his sleeper hits was this song called God's Plan. And you look at the song and you read the lyrics and you kind of get the impression he's got no impression of what God's plan is. And then you watch the video and you realize, oh, that impression's right, because the video has got nothing to do with what he sings about in the song. [10:37] And so he sings the song about God's plan, but he doesn't know what God's plan is. But Matthew points us absolutely clearly what God's plan is.

He writes for us with authority what God's plan is, that Jesus has come as a light, as God with authority, to fulfill God's plan to rescue the world.

You don't need to wonder about what God's plan is for your life. You can know it. Jesus has come as a light. And what are you going to do with that? And he comes as a light, as the fulfillment of God's plan, to fulfill the darkness, as one with authority over darkness.

And then just look at his message that he announces, how he's going to expel the darkness. Well, verse 17, from that time on, Jesus began to preach, repent, the kingdom of heaven has come near. And by repent there, he means stop what you're doing. Turn around. Walk the other way. A hundred percent. If you're someone who hasn't thought about God, if you've always put him on the shelf slightly, stop what you're doing.

[11:48] Turn around. Walk 180 degrees the other way and head to God. And then he says, the kingdom of heaven has come near. And what he is saying is that God, the king of heaven, has come into the world and God's kingdom has come into the world.

He's arrived in flesh. Jesus is here as God's king. And this announcement here is something that should make you sit up and pay attention. It should arrest you, stop you in your seat.

So what's the thing that's going to stop you in your seat? What's the thing that you're going to rush off to see? Is it Indiana Jones being filmed downtown Glasgow? I'm going to go off and go see that. Is it the Taliban are coming? I'm going to pack my bags and run away because those guys are bad. Or is it God has arrived? God's light has come into the world.

Is that the thing that's going to stop you in your tracks and make you sit up and think, I need to do something here. So having seen Jesus coming as God with authority to dispel the darkness as the fulfillment of God's plan, bringing spiritual light, the next thing we see is his authority over people.

[13:03] And so Jesus calls us on mission. In verse 18, we see him walking beside the lake as a light in the darkness and he calls his first apostles, disciples to him.

So we see Simon, who's called Peter, verse 19. Then we see his brother, Andrew, verse 19. And then the sons of Zebedee, James and John, in verse 18.

And in verse 19, having called Simon and Andrew out of the darkness, he calls them on mission. Did you notice that? So just look down at how verse 19 continues.

And I will send you out to fish for people. And in a world that's dark, where God is absent, where people are at sea, remember the sea is wicked and wild, and they're drowning, and they're waving to be rescued.

Jesus sends them out and calls his first apostles, giving them a promise that he'll make them fishers of people. They're going to rescue these people.

[14:05] They're going to grab them out the water. And so, maybe you've seen that, remember that movie, we've had a contemporary reference, here's an older reference for the oldies here.

Titanic, the movie? No? Yes? No? Right? We remember, right at the end of the movie, when all the people are floating in the sea, and they've gone away in the lifeboats because they don't want to get overwhelmed, and they come back, and they come back shouting, hello, are you out there?

Are you out there? And people are sinking in the sea, freezing, drowning, and they come back to rescue them, to pull them out of the water, into the lifeboat. Just notice how Simon and Andrew and James respond to Jesus' call.

Verse 20, there's an urgency at once. Verse 22, immediately, make haste. They don't hesitate. There's a costliness to it.

Verse 20, they left their nets. Verse 22, they left their boat and their father. It was costly. They left everything they knew behind them.

[15:08] They aren't going back, even though years later, this decision's gonna cost them their lives. And so, it might be that you're sitting here today as someone who trusts and believes in Jesus.

And although we might not go out in the same way that those first disciples, those apostles, went out, as fishes of people, it's not nothing.

We do have to do something. We do have to respond to Jesus' call in some way or fashion. We can't sit by and sit back and think that there's no call on our life to respond.

If people are drowning, are stuck in darkness, how will we respond? If you've been following the news, one of the big scandals in politics was Dominic Raab's holiday.

Anyone remember that? And we remember how the people in Afghan were crying out for rescue and Dominic Raab came under flack for going on holiday at this time.

[16:15] And this passage is really encouraging us not to be like that, to not go on holiday, to not sunbathe, because people are crying out for rescue.

They're drowning. And so, what might that look like for us? It might not be that radical call like the first apostles, but it might simply be living in a very distinctive way in your working week, at your job, at your school, or whatever it is.

If you live as a Christian, distinctively, people will come speak to you. People will notice that you are different from everyone else. It might mean simply being devoted in prayer for people, just praying for people that they would be rescued, that they will come to the light, that they would come to Jesus.

It might be that if you are a parent and you are struggling and figuring out how to bring up your kids well, enduring and endeavoring to bring your children up trusting in Jesus, not exasperating them, not placing a burden on them, but just winsomely praying for them, trying to figure out how can I get them to trust in Jesus.

It might be simply being kind and compassionate to those people around you, your neighbors, making a meal, keeping an eye out for them, collecting their Amazon parcels when they get delivered, and very simple, small things that reflect on the kindness that we have been shown as Christians.

[17:45] So Jesus comes as a light and next we see that he shows us and that he comes to heal, verse 23 and 24.

And what we have in these verses is we see Jesus' authority over sickness and death. He heals every imaginable disease possible and it's really a picture of what it looks like when the kingdom of heaven comes into reality, of what it's going to look like, of what it's going to be in God's kingdom, of having God with us.

He'll drive out all the darkness. He'll drive out all that sickness. And it's going to be a kingdom that's free from disease and every sickness and suffering. And so we might be here as a number of us who might be suffering today with some sort of sickness.

We might know someone who's suffering. And we might think, why does Jesus not heal their sickness? And while he may heal their sickness, if he does not, then we should not use that as a reason to harden our hearts to this message and think Jesus doesn't care.

And the reason for this is that all the sickness and disease has entered the world through sin, through our rejection of Jesus.

[19:12] And the world is dark because it has rejected God. And that's the definition of sin. And the sickness is there to show us that the world is groaning and it's under judgment because it said no to God.

And the way to come out from that, being under that judgment, is to turn to the light and to repent because the kingdom of heaven is here.

The king is here. And he's announcing a kingdom where sin will be conquered and there'll be no sickness. And it's not, we don't do that thinking that life will be glorious and perfect from now on and that every disease will be healed.

But we do that knowing that a world will come, the kingdom of heaven will come, and that world will be perfect, free from sickness and disease.

There'll be no more sin there. So if you're a doctor here today, I'm very sorry, there'll be no doctors in heaven. It'll be a wonderful world with no sickness and death.

[20:13] And so Jesus comes as a light with God's authority to fulfill God's plan to rescue the world from sin and sickness and death and to bring us into a better world that will be wonderful, free from sin and sickness.

And the real sickness that Jesus has come to heal is the more serious sickness of sin and death, which those daily struggles that we go through point to.

And then very finally, we're going to look at Jesus comes as a light, and he comes for all people, verse 25 and then verses 15 and 16.

And we see Jesus begin his ministry in Capernaum, in the land of Zebulun, Naphtali, and we've thought a bit about how God's people have gone away from there, and it's just filled with non-Jewish people, Gentiles, the world had come in there.

But look at how the section ends in verse 25. Did you see how wonderful that picture is? It's a picture of what we are here today, this morning. Large crowds from the Galilee, that's Galilee of the Gentiles up in the north.

[21 : 22] The Decapolis, that was a Gentile region where non-Jewish people, non-Hebrews lived. Jerusalem, that's the Jewish heartland, had come to Jesus.

Judea, the area around Jerusalem, all the Jewish people there, and the region across the Jordan, and well, that's just shorthand for everywhere else, perhaps, had followed him.

They'd all come to Jesus to know him. And so we've got this great picture of people coming from all over the show, coming to Jesus, all flocking to the light, exactly as Isaiah had predicted 800 years before.

Just look at verse 15 again. The land of Zebulun, the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, everywhere else, and Galilee of the Gentiles, that place where all those non-Jewish people, those Greek people live.

They all come exactly as Isaiah has said. That's been fulfilled in Jesus' coming. And they come from all over. And it starts in Galilee.

[22 : 27] And we see the world coming to him in Galilee. But by the end of his ministry, right at the end of Matthew's gospel, we read how Jesus says to Peter and Andrew, his first apostles, I will send you out to fish for people.

And then at the end of the gospel, he goes, chapter 28, verse 18. Then Jesus came to them and said, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

So as Jesus comes, we see the world coming to him. And as he goes, his spirit continues working through the Bible and through his apostles as they go out to all the world and through us as we speak to our friends, as we gossip the gospel, as we try to live distinctive Christian lives wherever we are.

So Jesus comes as a light in darkness. He's got authority over darkness. He dispels it. He comes as a light and calls us on mission.

He's got authority over us. He comes to heal. He's got authority over sickness. And it's a picture of what God's kingdom will be like and that all God's promises are true in Jesus, that he'll conquer sin and shows us a promised land that will be perfect and amazing.

[24 : 00] And then finally, Jesus comes as a light and he calls all people. He's got authority over all the world. All the world is Jesus. Jesus is.

So how will we respond to this? What will you do? How will you respond to that message of Jesus coming into the world as God's kingdom in the world, calling us to turn, calling us to repent?

How will you respond? Maybe you are someone here who's not certain of Jesus and his claims. Well, they are big claims. They're serious claims.

They're claims that we should sit up and pay attention to. And so do a chat to myself or Amy or Robbie or Simon afterwards or anyone else, maybe a friend, and ask them, tell me more about this, Jesus.

Explain this to me again. Maybe you are someone here who's already trusting and believing and you've already turned 180 degrees and you're continuing to do that day by day.

[25 : 03] How will you respond to Jesus coming as the light then? Will you take up the baton? Will you think about how you're going to live in a world that's in darkness, that's drowning, and that's rejected?

And will you look out for them? Will you go out as a lifeboat to rescue them rather than sun tanning on the beach in Cyprus?

Great. Let's pray as we close. So, Father, we thank you that Jesus has come as a light into the world.

Please help us to flee to that light daily. Please help us to be drawn to the light. Please help us to stop what we're doing, to change and respond appropriately.

Please help us to see that in Jesus, your plan has come into its fullness, has been fulfilled completely. Everything has been done.

[26 : 03] We don't have to wonder. We can know that God is with us. Please help us to think about these things carefully, to go out from here later to discuss them with our friends and over coffee and what.

Please help us to take these words seriously and read them often and think about them dearly. In Jesus' name, Amen.