

NEW BEGINNINGS: JESUS BEGINS TO PREACH
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Matthew 4:12-25, NIV

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee.

¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—

¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—

¹⁶ 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.”

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

The Calling of the First Disciples

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹ 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, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. ²⁴ 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.

²⁵ Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

Matthew 4:12-25 KJV

¹² Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee;

¹³ And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim:

¹⁴ That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

¹⁵ The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles;

¹⁶ The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

¹⁸ And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

¹⁹ And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

²⁰ And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

²¹ And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.

²² And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

²³ And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

²⁴ And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.

²⁵ And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan.

One of the things that makes life bearable for us is our routines. We fall into our routines and we do them and we are satisfied with the familiar that comes from doing them. Our routines become what we popularly call “our Comfort zone” and none of us enjoys leaving our comfort zone. For some people the ‘comfort zone’ is the routine of going to work each day, doing what is necessary there, coming back home in the evening, doing what’s necessary there, and then propping our feet up in our favorite recliner and watching some familiar TV program before going to bed. Whatever our routine, it is our way of making life more bearable, our way of coping with life. We cannot live without routines.

Jesus had his routines established too. He got up each morning, did the necessary chores, and went to the carpente’s shop that his stepfather, Joseph, had established in the little village of Nazareth. He was content to do these things. Yet, in His heart He knew that He was destined for more, and that soon He really must be about His Father’s business. The time would come, and He would be ready for the time.

The time came. A forerunner had come, and was preaching in the wilderness of Judea a message that called Jesus from His village shop to the waters of Jordan, near Aenon. That message was the key that Jesus waited for. It was God’s message: *Repent! The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!* That was God’s Word to Jesus! His time had come. He must change everything. He must leave forever His “comfort zone” and go with God! He experienced something that every Christian missionary since has experienced. And so He went; was baptized by John; was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted; and now, the Word was clear: He must go again!

During this time of the year we must think about change in the life of Christ, and how that we too must change.

I. A CHANGE OF PLACE.

As you perhaps know, little Palestine, which looms so large in the history of the world, is, relatively speaking, a very small place, just 10,000 sq. mi. in area. In his book on the NT, Hester says, “The entire country could be placed three times in South Carolina, seven times in Missouri, and 26 times in Texas.” Somewhere I have read that the land is 100 miles long, from Dan to

Beersheba, and some 31 miles across at the longest point, from the Mediterranean to the Arabian Desert. So small is Israel that any move on the part of Jesus might be construed as insignificant.

But this change of place was significant to Jesus. It meant leaving the familiar for the unknown, of leaving the comfortable for the uncomfortable. When you've lived in one place since birth, or for 30 years, it is very difficult. Martha and I had lived in the 'head of Caney' for nearly that long when we ventured to our present home below ALC. There were adjustments we had to make, and, I might add, there still are. Our lifestyle differs markedly from the lifestyles of some around us. Our values are different from theirs. We've had to make adjustments. Jesus was no different than us in His humanness. Change was also difficult for Him. But when God told Him to go! He went.

His journey took Him from Judea to Galilee, back to His Nazareth home, where He completely pulled up stakes, said His goodbyes, and made His new home in Capernaum, by the Sea of Galilee. In this Seacoast town, he would set up the headquarters for His 3 ½ year ministry.

Many of us are pretty settled in where we will stay and in what we are doing. But not all. For example, the college students who have come to Alice Lloyd have had to make a change in their lives too. Many of them are unaware of the absoluteness of that change. They go home from time to time, some every weekend, and they are still tied to their places of abode, not knowing that 'they can never really go home again.' They have made a radical, but very necessary, decision. Why have they made such a decision? I submit to you that it is because that is God's will for their lives, even if they don't know it just yet. Just as Jesus decisively changed His residence, they have changed theirs too.

Sometimes God moves us in mysterious ways. Sometimes He uses the familiar. Sometimes we get fired, and we complain of how unfair others are to us or to our family members. Have we ever considered that God is just using this to move us out of our 'comfort zones' and into His larger plan for our lives. I have been fired before and it didn't kill me. I survived. And it was probably the best thing that ever happened to me. God said, "Move on!" And, when I proved stubborn, He moved me on! Jesus was submissive to the voice of God. God said, "Go!" And He went from Nazareth to Capernaum.

The Gospels are almost sufficient in themselves to fix the site, indicating that Capernaum was (a) by the lake-side (Mt. 4:13); (b) near a political border, so that a customs-post (Mk. 2:14) and military detachment were necessary (Mt. 8:5-13; Lk. 7:1-10); (c) near Gennesaret (Mk. 6:53; Jn. 6:22, 59), which is an area of highly productive land at the northwest of the Lake. In short Capernaum was the nearest village to the river Jordan on the northwest shores of the Sea of Galilee, a position occupied in fact by the ruins of Tell Hum. This is confirmed by Josephus Vita 403, which indicates a village close to Julias (et-Tell) in the direction of Magdala/Tarichaeae (Mejdel). Capernaum was also near a most copious spring which watered Gennesaret (BJ 3. 519).

II. A CHANGE OF PROFESSIONS.

As we are told quite a number of times in the New Testament, Jesus was a carpenter. That was His profession in Nazareth. We are not exactly sure what a carpenter did in Jesus' day, but William Barclay says that Jesus did such things as fixing yokes for oxen, and things that were needed in every day labor. Jesus did not disdain this work. In fact, He loved work; and I am certain He would have chosen the typical physical labor of the common man if that had been God's choice for Him. He would have continued to do the best work of the village, and to have made men happy by His craftsmanship. But God had another task for Him, a task much harder, a task that would take Him through all the country and villages, a task in which only He could fulfill.

4:12-16. Matthew presented an important time factor in his account when he noted Jesus did not officially begin His public ministry until John the Baptist had been put in prison. The reason for John's imprisonment was not presented here, but it was stated later (14:3). When Jesus learned of John's imprisonment, He went from Nazareth and settled in Capernaum (Luke 4:16-30 explains why He left Nazareth). This region was the area settled by the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali after the conquest of Joshua's time. Isaiah had prophesied (Isa. 9:1-2) that light would come to this region, and Matthew saw this movement of Jesus as fulfillment of this prophecy. One of Messiah's works was to bring light into darkness, for He would be a light to both Jews and Gentiles (cf. John 1:9; 12:46).

4:17. When John was imprisoned, Jesus began to preach. His words had a familiar ring: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near (cf. 3:2). The twofold message of John was now proclaimed by the Messiah. The work of God was rapidly moving toward the establishing of the glorious kingdom of God on earth. If one wanted to be a part of the kingdom, he must repent. Repentance was mandatory if fellowship with God was to be enjoyed.

Jesus then began His new profession, a profession that was not really a profession, but a Call. God had a calling on His life, and He would do what God commanded to the glory of God. He was called to give Light to the darkness; He was called to be "the Light of the World."

"Jesus called disciples and they followed him (Mk. 1:20). The Epistles, especially Paul's, make clear the theological meaning of Christ's call. It comes from God, through the gospel for salvation through sanctification and belief (2 Thes. 2:14) to God's kingdom (1 Thes. 2:12), for fellowship (1 Cor. 1:9) and service (Gal 1:15)"

Later in this chapter we find the disciples being called. Jesus says to Simon and Andrew, brothers, fishermen. And fishing was the only trade they knew. So Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." What did they do? They left into the unknown. And how about the Sons of Thunder, James and John? They left their nets, their boat and their father, Zebedee, and followed this powerful new preacher.

4:18-22. Since Jesus is the promised Messiah, He had the right to call men from their normal pursuits of life to follow Him. This was not the first time these men had met Jesus, for the Fourth Gospel relates Jesus' first meeting with some of the disciples (John 1:35-42). Jesus now called these fishermen to leave their profession behind and to begin following Him permanently. He would take them from fishing for fish and make them fishers of men. The message of the coming

kingdom needed to be proclaimed widely so that many could hear and could become, by repentance, subjects of His kingdom. The calling carried with it a cost, for it involved leaving not only one's profession but also one's family responsibilities. Matthew noted that James and John left not only their fishing, but also their father, to begin following Jesus.

I submit to you that Since Jesus is the Promised Messiah, Savior and Lord of all mankind, the King, He has a royal right to call us from our comfort zone as well. He has a right to call us from our normal pursuits of life to follow Him. Could it be that this morning Jesus is calling you to follow Him in baptism? To follow Him in mission service somewhere in the world? To surrender to Him to preach His Gospel to others? What is Jesus calling you to do? He wants us all to be willing to change. In fact we must be willing to leave Pippa Passes and to change our professions, if the King commands it.

III. A CHANGE OF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS.

Jesus must certainly have been quite popular in Nazareth, well liked, a quite person who never disturbed anyone. Later when He returned to Nazareth, the people were amazed at Him and His claims, and said, "Is not this Joseph's son; and does not His family live here in Nazareth." He lived an obscure life there; He left; now He returns with fire; and His own friends, the young men He grew up with, try to kill Him.

When Jesus left the small village behind, He knew that those whom He was leaving would never understand Him, not even His own parents, nor would they understand His reason for leaving. But leaving those you love behind is always hard, particularly hard in a 'family-oriented' society, a society like that of Nazareth. I cannot imagine, can you, of the difficulty faced by the Southern Baptist Missionaries in the hospital of Yemen, as they left their families and their comfort zones behind to serve in a Moslem land because they were following Jesus who said Go! And Jesus had given them an unquenchable love for the Yemeni people, His love! Now, despite the sadness of bereaved family members and friends, they have made the most profound statement of their love, saying by their deeds, "Like my dear Savior, Jesus, I have died for you." That will perhaps have more impact on the Yemeni than they could have made in their entire lives.

There were always those who saw and heard Jesus and said derisively, "He's a Nazarene." Or, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth." These statements were common in Jesus day. Jesus never severed His ties with the people of Nazareth. He continued to love them, despite the fact that they severed their ties with Him. "He came unto His own and His own received Him not."

Sometimes we, too, need to change our place, maybe our professions, and perhaps our personal relationships. It is so much easier for us to maneuver around the problems we have with those we know well. While it is true that familiarity breeds contempt, it is also comfortable. God may be calling on us to make some new relationships this year, with a set of other sinners like us or even sinners unlike us. I challenge you to heap the love of Jesus Christ upon someone for at least a year, and you will see marvelous changes in your life as well as in theirs. God may

want you to go to some other culture, and there show the Love of Jesus Christ in all your dealings with them.

IV. FINALLY, WITH JESUS, THERE WAS A CHANGE OF PRIORITIES.

He would perhaps have loved to have stayed in that carpenter's shop at Nazareth. Had He done so, there would have been no salvation for the world.

An anonymous author made this striking comparison:

"Socrates taught for 40 years, Plato for 50, Aristotle for 40, and Jesus for only 3. Yet the influence of Christ's 3-year ministry infinitely transcends the impact left by the combined 130 years of teaching from these men who were among the greatest philosophers of all antiquity. Jesus painted no pictures; yet some of the finest paintings of Raphael, Michelangelo, and Leonardo de Vinci received their inspiration from Him. Jesus wrote no poetry; but Dante, Milton, and scores of the world's greatest poets were inspired by Him. Jesus composed no music; still Haydn, Handel, Beethoven, Bach, and Mendelssohn reached their highest perfection of melody in the hymns, symphonies, and oratorios they composed in His praise. Every sphere of human greatness has been enriched by this humble Carpenter of Nazareth.

"His unique contribution to the race of men is the salvation of the soul! Philosophy could not accomplish that. Nor art. Nor literature. Nor music. Only Jesus Christ can break the enslaving chains of sin and Satan. He alone can speak peace to the human heart, strengthen the weak, and give life to those who are spiritually dead."

That could never have been written if Christ had stayed in His carpenter's shop. There had to be a different set of priorities than just making good yokes for the oxen. That change of priorities was really, however, not a change, for even in His carpenter's shop, Jesus knew what He must someday do. Someone suggested that when the shadow of two boards crossed in that shop, Jesus knew it was for Him. Even at the age of twelve, He said, "I must be about my Father's business."

John was cast into prison for his faith. What a strange time, what a dangerous time, for Jesus to start His ministry. But it was the right time. Now, not tomorrow! He must put the priorities into place. He was 30 years old. He was listening for God's voice. The Voice said, "Now, my Son, Now!" And Jesus started preaching the same message as John the Baptizer, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

But notice something different—Jesus, unlike John, had a 3-fold ministry: preaching, teaching, and healing. Jesus' priority was quite simple: To glorify God, and to Serve man! And so His priorities were beyond those of John the Baptist. He would preach for the sake of man's spirit; teach for the sake of man's mind; and heal for the sake of man's body. Jesus would touch the whole man! As man's Creator, He would do no less.

^{Matt 4:23} Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him

I do not know what God wants you to do. I know He is calling all of us to follow Him. That is radical doctrine. That means putting faith to work. That means putting into action the words we preach. Gods calls us from our comfort zones. God wants to see real meaningful change in our lives. That may mean a change of place, a change of profession, a change of personal relationships, a change of priorities. Are you willing to step forward and make that change?