

Matthew: On Earth As It Is In Heaven

Follow Me * Matthew 4:12-25

Introduction

Thank you Craig for getting us started this morning. And as you can tell, we have another great passage in front of us. But before we get to that, I want to briefly refer to one other passage, 2 Corinthians 3:18. It says this:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV)

Now, you may or may not remember that this is the verse I preached from in my candidating message some 16 months ago. I did so because I believe it is what faithful, gospel-centered, Christ-exalting, Spirit-empowered ministry is all about. It is about transformation, specifically the transformation of lost, sinful, broken people into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

And I can tell you that I am thrilled to see this kind of transformation happening at Harmony Bible Church. Today at the end of the service we are going to baptize eight people who have been transformed in recent days and now want to take the next step in following Jesus. And that is what it is all about. It is very exciting stuff. Lot's of people being transformed and committing to pursuing God's desires for their lives and for our Church.

That said, I know there are some who are still unsure. Some who are on the fence, so to speak, and undecided as to if they are going to go all in. And if this is you, my goal today is to push you to the brink. I want you to come to the place where you make the decision if you are going to follow Jesus or not. In verse 19 of our passage Jesus makes Peter and Andrew an offer. He gives them the opportunity to follow Him. And today, Jesus is making the same offer to us. The only question is how we will respond. Will we respond like the first disciples, or will we choose to go our own way? That is the question for today. Make no mistake friends. Today through His Word, Jesus puts the ball squarely in our court. He says, "Will you follow me?" The only question left is, "how will we respond?"

What Does It Mean to Follow Jesus?

Now, before we make our decision, let's take a look at what it means to follow Jesus. What exactly does it entail? Well, our text tells us that it includes four things. But before we get to those four things, let me give you a heads up on where Matthew is going next. When we hit chapter 5, we will start into the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest sermon that has ever been preached. Given that it is three chapters long, we are going to be there for quite a while. And while there are many ways to look at the Sermon on the Mount, I can tell you that it is essentially a detailed teaching on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. This means that in our passage today, Matthew is giving us the big picture view of discipleship, and then in the Sermon on the Mount he will point out the details. In many ways, the end of Matthew 4 is an introduction to the Sermon on the Mount. An introduction that gives the big picture view of everything Jesus will preach in chapters 5-7. So, keeping that in mind, here is the big picture view of what it means to follow Jesus, with the details to follow in the weeks ahead.

1. Understanding whom Jesus is.

Number one, following Jesus means understanding who he is. Before we respond to Jesus' call to "Follow Me" we need to know who the *me* is. And let me say that pretty much everything in this message hinges on this point. If you don't get this, the rest of the message will mean little to you. That's because, to a great deal, this is the primary thing that Matthew has been trying to show us in the first four chapters. To this point Jesus hasn't performed any miracles or preached any sermons. Both of those things are going to change in our passage today, but so far Matthew has focused on making it clear whom Jesus is. And let's do a little review of what He has shown us so far.

In chapter 1, he tells us that Jesus is the Savior. In fact, that is what the name Jesus means. Perhaps you remember verse 21:

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21 ESV)

He also tells us that Jesus is the Messiah. That is what the title "Christ" means. Jesus is God's anointed one who has been sent to rescue us.

He tells us that Jesus is the Son of David. He is the long-awaited King who will sit on David's throne forever.

But not only is He the Son of David, but He is also the Son of Abraham. He is the one in whom all of the nations of the world will be blessed.

The final thing Matthew tells us about Jesus in chapter 1 is that through the virgin birth He is both fully man and fully God. And therefore was worthy to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Moving on to chapter 2, through the story of the wise men, Matthew clearly points out that Jesus is the King – the King who deserves our worship.

In chapter 3, Matthew makes us aware that Jesus, the King, is also the Judge who has come to gather His people and punish those who reject Him. What's more, He is also the Son of God, the one who is completely and fully pleasing to the Father.

Finally, the last two weeks in the first part of chapter 4 we have seen that Jesus is the Sinless One, the one who experienced temptation fully but never gave in.

All of this leads us to our passage today, where Matthew tells us two more things about Jesus. First, in verses 12-16, he tells us that Jesus is the Light of the World.

Look at the verses with me:

Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. [13] And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, [14] so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: [15] "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— [16] the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned." (Matthew 4:12-16 ESV)

Let me set the context for you a little bit. You may remember that Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River, somewhere north of the Dead Sea, [MAP], in the region of Judea, not too far from Jerusalem. After His temptation and John's subsequent arrest, Jesus leaves Judea and heads to Galilee, which is the northernmost part of Israel, [MAP]. Specifically, He goes to live in the town of Capernaum, which is on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. And Matthew says that this happens to fulfill a prophecy by Isaiah that the people of Zebulun and Naphtali would see a great light. Now, what exactly is this referring too? Well, Zebulun and Naphtali were the two most northern of the 12 tribes of Israel, the tribes who had originally inhabited the region of Galilee. What is notable about these tribes is that they had failed to drive out the other nations

who had been living there and so very quickly after entering the Promised Land they had intermarried and fallen away from the Lord. Therefore, Galilee had become a melting pot, so to speak, of nations and religion– hence the name *Galilee of the Gentiles*. Most notably, this had led to it becoming a very dark place spiritually.

The big thing we need to see here is that Jesus' arrival in Galilee means that the bright light of salvation has come to those who are living in darkness. And I want to point out to you that if you are a believer you should read verse 16 with excitement and thanksgiving, particularly if you are a Gentile, which I am pretty confident all of us are. You see, this passage shows us that Jesus came not only for the Jews but also for us. He came specifically for us who were dwelling in darkness and under the shadow of death. Jesus is the light who drives the darkness away. Jesus is the one who allows us to see the truth. Are you thankful for that today? So, Jesus is the light of the world. But Matthew also goes on to tell us in verse 23-25 that Jesus is the Great Teacher and the Great Physician. Look at these verses with me:

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. [24] So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. [25] And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. (Matthew 4:23-25 ESV)

We will actually study these verses a little more closely next week because in essence they serve as an overview to chapters 5-9. They tell us that Jesus' ministry was both in word and in deed. He taught and He healed. He preached and performed miracles. In chapters 5-7 we have the teaching, and in chapters 8-9 we have the miracles.

So, this is who Jesus is. He is the Savior, Messiah, Son of David, Son of Abraham, fully God and fully man, King, Judge, Son of God, Sinless One, Light of the World, Great Teacher and Great Physician. All of which should lead to the most important question in the entire world. Do you know what it is? The most important question in the world is, what do you do in response to who Jesus is? Or to put it another way, what do you do with Jesus? All of human history hangs on the answer to this question – specifically your history.

Well, verse 17 gives us Jesus' opinion. Take a look at it:

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17 ESV)

2. Repenting of sin

The second thing it means to follow Jesus is repenting of sin. Now, we have talked about this a great deal and so I will simply remind you that repentance is a change in mind that leads to a change in direction. It means to agree with God that we have sinned, to display the proper contrition for our sin, and to commit to doing things God's way.

Let me share one major implication of Jesus' message; without repentance there is no salvation. And in order to be saved, in order to become a follower of Jesus, you have to repent of your sins. The reason this is so important is that way too often the need for repentance is left out of our understanding of what it means to be saved. Just think about how we often talk to people about being saved. We say things like, "All you have to do is ask Jesus into your heart, and you will be saved." The problem with this is that in order to be saved, people first have to understand why they need to be saved. They have to understand that they need to be saved because their sin has separated them from God. And before they can be restored to a relationship with God, they must turn from that sin. In other words, before they can receive the good news that God will save them, they have to acknowledge the bad news of why they need to be saved in the first place. So, let's be crystal clear about this. Following Jesus begins by understanding who He is, which then leads to the recognition of the need for and the actual repenting of sin. A great example of this is found in Luke 5. Take your Bibles and turn there with me.

Some commentators believe that the events in Luke 5 are the parallel account of what we see here in Matthew 4, with the two authors telling the same story from slightly different perspectives. And Luke adds some details that are helpful to understanding what following Jesus truly looks like. Pick up with me in verse 1:

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, [2] and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. [3] Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. [4] And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." [5] And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." [6] And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking.

[7] They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. [8] But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." [9] For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, [10] and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." [11] And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. (Luke 5:1-11 ESV)

Verse 8 is key. When Peter recognizes who Jesus is, what does he do? He immediately falls on his knees and repents. So, let me ask this of everyone. Have you done likewise? Have you recognized who Jesus is and have you responded by repenting of your sins? If not, Jesus calls you to do so. And his offer is the same today as it was 2,000 years ago. If you will repent, you will be saved. Your sin will be gone, and you will have the joy and privilege of following Jesus.

Now, if you have been paying close attention, you will note that in both Luke 5 and Matthew 4, repenting of sin is not the only thing included in following Jesus. Before we turn back to Matthew 4, note what else Peter and his companions do. Verse 11:

And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

3. Leaving everything else for Him.

The third thing included in following Jesus is leaving everything else for Him. Let's go back to Matthew 4 to see it there. Look at verse 18-22:

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. [19] And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." [20] Immediately they left their nets and followed him. [21] And 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. [22] Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-22 ESV)

In both verses 20 and 22 all four fishermen have the same response to Jesus. They immediately leave everything and follow Him. The repetition of the response tells us that this is the most important thing that Matthew wants us to get. It is his way of underlining or putting his main point in bold. And let's make sure that we understand exactly what everything included for these men.

- **It included leaving their careers.**

It included leaving their careers. Jesus comes to them, says, “follow me” and they immediately leave their occupation behind. And we have to be careful that we don’t fall prey to the idea that these men were poor and barely able to survive, as if they weren’t really giving up much in following Jesus. Yes, they may not have been wealthy, but they were making a respectable living, and the fact that they owned boats shows that they did have much to lose, including the family business.

- **It included leaving their possessions.**

Following Jesus also included leaving their possessions. Note that they didn’t say, “Ok Jesus, just give us a little time to liquidate our assets and then we will follow.” The minute Jesus says follow me, they drop their nets, step out of their boats and leave it all behind.

- **It included leaving their family.**

What’s more, following Jesus included leaving their family. James and John leave not only their careers and their possessions, but also their father Zebedee. And this is not the only time we see this in the NT. In Luke 9 Jesus has this interaction with a potential disciple:

Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” [62] Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:61-62 ESV)

In other words, don’t even worry about saying goodbye to mom and dad. Leave them and follow me.

- **It included leaving their comfort.**

What’s more, following Jesus included leaving their comfort. Take a look at this conversation between Jesus and an interested religious leader a little later in Matthew:

A scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” [20] And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Matthew 8:19-20 ESV)

In other words, following me isn't going to be easy. It's going to be difficult. It will be uncomfortable. There will be sleepless nights and difficult days. Following me means leaving your comfort.

- **It included leaving their safety.**

Finally, following Jesus for these men included leaving their safety. In Matthew 10 Jesus sends his 12 disciples out on their first ministry assignment. But before doing so, He gives them this warning:

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. [17] Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, [18] and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. (Matthew 10:16-18 ESV)

Jesus' prophecy here became true for every single one of his disciples. They would all eventually face severe persecution because they had followed Him.

- **It included leaving everything.**

So bottom line, for these men following Jesus meant leaving everything. In fact, in Matthew 19:27, Peter says to Jesus:

We have left everything and followed you. (Matthew 19:27 ESV)

And guess what, this is what it means for us as well. If we want to follow Jesus, we must leave everything for Him. Now, let me be clear that this does not necessarily mean that you have to go out today and quit your job, sell all of your possessions, and tell your family, "see you later." But it might mean that. And for certain it means that these things can no longer be your priority. It means that you must be willing to give them up for the sake of Christ. It means that if Jesus says something must go, you willingly let it go. Let me remind you of a passage that we looked at closely back in our Disciple Series a few months ago. Matthew 16:24-25:

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. [25] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:24-25 ESV)

This means that when we decide to follow Jesus, we decide to give up the right to our lives. In Jesus' words, we lose them. We no longer live for ourselves and what we want,

but rather for what He wants. Always, in everything. This means that we don't think about our career in terms of advancement or success, but rather in relation to how we can advance the gospel. If we can advance the gospel more by not taking a promotion, or by staying closer to home, or by quitting altogether, we do it.

This means that if selling some or even all of our possessions will allow us to follow Jesus more closely, we do it.

This means that if Jesus calls us to move far away for the sake of the gospel, we do it.

This means that if we have to give up some of our comfort so that others can hear about Jesus, we do it.

And this means that if we have to risk our well-being or face persecution to share the gospel we do it. That is what it means to follow Jesus.

Let me be clear about something regarding the text that might be helpful here. It would be untrue to say that the disciples understood all that it would mean for them to follow Jesus. But they did understand that it would mean everything. My point is that when we respond to Jesus' call to follow Him, we cannot know all that it will mean for us. But we can know that it will mean everything.

Now, let me try to address a question that you might be dying to ask as you hear all of this. It's a very simple question. Why? Why would I give up my career, my possessions, my family, my comfort, and my safety to follow Jesus? I mean, what exactly is in it for me? Let's be honest. Many of us would like to ask that question, wouldn't we? Well, I am glad you have asked. I am glad that you have asked because the answer ties together everything we see in this passage, and I believe in the entire matter of discipleship. For the answer to this question, turn with me to Matthew 13.

Matthew 13 is full of parables. There is the parable of the sower, the parable of the weeds, the parable of the mustard seed, and several others. But perhaps the most important one of all is just one verse long. Look at verse 44:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (Matthew 13:44 ESV)

For simplicity's sake, replace the phrase kingdom of heaven with Jesus, so that it reads like this:

Jesus is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

The point is that when we recognize how valuable Jesus truly is, we will give up everything we have to get Him. And we won't do it begrudgingly, but joyfully.

Now, stick with me here because I want to make sure that you get this. Imagine a guy walking through a small field one day, a field of only a few acres with little tillable ground, a field that is hard to access and has little apparent worth. Perhaps it is right around this time of year and he is out shed hunting. And while he is walking across the field he happens to trip over something sticking out of the ground. And when he looks down, he notices that what he has tripped over is kind of shiny. And so he gets down on his knees and starts digging around, and low and behold he finds a hidden treasure, a treasure of immense value. What will he do? Well, he will cover up the treasure as fast as he can and then run to the bank even faster to get as much money as he possibly can in order to buy that field. He will sell whatever he can. He will mortgage whatever he can - his house, his car, his kids. And then he will offer the owner of the field everything he needs to in order to buy that field. He will go into incredible debt if he has too. Why? Because he knows that it is completely worth it. He knows that what he is buying is immensely more valuable than what he currently has. He knows that when he has that treasure the things he has temporarily given up will pale in comparison to what he has gained. And friends, so it is with following Jesus. Yes, it temporarily costs everything we have – but it is so worth it. And you know why it is worth it? Because Jesus is worth it. And that is what Matthew has been trying to get across to us in the first four chapters of his gospel. That's why in order to understand what it means to follow Jesus; you have to understand who He is first. You have to grasp just how great, and mighty, and powerful He truly is. You have to come to the point that Peter did where you understand that He is the Lord and you need Him to save you. And when you get to this point, when you understand who He truly is, there is nothing else you can do but drop everything else and follow Him.

4. Making disciples

Now, there is one more thing our text tells us is included in following Jesus. Take a look one more time at verse 19:

And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

To follow Jesus means to lead other people to follow Him. Or to put it more simply, to follow Jesus means to make disciples. And I hope you see that there is really no way of

getting around this. Jesus makes it very clear. His offer to follow Him is an offer to give ourselves to making disciples. Look at it again. *I will make you fishers of men.* Another way to translate it is, “from now on you will be catching people.”

Now, here is the truth. There are a lot of difficult things about following Jesus. But this just might be the most difficult. For many of us who are genuinely following Him and have made Him the priority in our lives, there is nothing more difficult than fishing for people. There is nothing more difficult than sharing our faith, especially with those who want nothing to do with it. But let me share two encouraging things from Jesus’ statement here.

One, note that He says He will make His disciples fishers of men. Do you know what this means? It means that they weren’t equipped to do so when He first called them. Now, some have proposed that, because these men were fishermen, there were certain qualities that made them attractive candidates to Jesus. But the truth is that nothing could be further from the truth. They were uneducated, theologically narrow-minded, bigoted, hot-tempered, unsteady men from a despised part of the world. I mean, and we will see this as we go through Matthew, their ineptness is almost comical at times. In fact, it would have been hard for Jesus to have picked people who were less qualified than these men. And this is good news for us, because it means if God could make these men into disciple makers, He can do it with us too. Listen. God doesn’t choose us because He needs us or because of what we have to offer Him, but because He wants to give us the joy of being used by Him to accomplish the greatest thing in the world – bringing people to Him. One of my favorite books of the Bible is Acts. It’s amazing to see how God transforms the world through men who only a few months before were denying Him and running scared. And I have to tell you that I look at how God used these ordinary men, and wonder if He couldn’t do the same with us here in SE Iowa. Something to dream about, isn’t it?

But that’s not the only encouraging thing here. Note also the thing that makes Jesus’ first disciples. How are Jesus’ first disciples made? They are made through His Word. Jesus says, “Follow me,” and they respond and follow Him. And get this; it works the same way today. In reality, we are not the ones who make disciples. Jesus is. And He does so today just like he did 2,000 years ago, through His Word. You see, as we learned last week, there is power in the very words of God. And our job is simply to speak those words. This should take all of the pressure off of us. We are not responsible for whether people follow Jesus or not. We are just responsible to make the offer. It is true that some will not respond. That’s ok. But guess what? Many will. And here is how I know that this is the case – it’s happening here at Harmony. Nowadays it’s almost every week that I hear of someone new that our people are

ministering to and/or have lead to Jesus. And so part of me this morning wants to stand back and say job well done – and keep it up.

Now, that said, I want to leave you with a challenge this morning. I think this last point has some major implications for the future of Harmony Bible Church. I believe we are coming to a point where we are going to have to decide what kind of church we are going to be. Or maybe to put it a better way, each of us is going to have to decide what kind of church we want to be a part of. To illustrate this, let me share a story that is a parable of the history of many churches:

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks were frequent, a crude little rescue station was built. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted crewmen kept a constant watch over the sea. With no thought for themselves, they went out day or night, tirelessly searching for any who might need help. Many lives were saved by their devoted efforts. After a while the station became famous. Some of those who were saved, as well as others in the surrounding area, wanted to become a part of the work. They gave time and money for its support. New boats were bought, additional crews were trained, and the station grew. Some of the members became unhappy that the building was so crude. They felt a larger, nicer place would be more appropriate as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. So they replaced the emergency cots with hospital beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building. Soon the station became a popular gathering place for its members to discuss the work and to visit with each other. They continued to remodel and decorate until the station more and more took on the look and character of a club. Fewer members were interested in going out on rescue missions, so they hired professional crews to do the work on their behalf. The rescue motif still prevailed on the club emblems and stationery, and there was a liturgical lifeboat in the room where the club held its initiations. One day a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in many boatloads of cold, wet, half-drowned people. They were dirty, bruised, and sick; and some had black or yellow skin. The beautiful new club was terribly messed up, and so the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside, where the shipwreck victims could be cleaned up before coming inside. At the next meeting there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's rescue activities altogether, as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted on keeping rescue as their primary purpose and pointed out that, after all, they were still called a rescue station. But those members were voted down and told that if they wanted to save lives they could begin their own station down the coast somewhere. As the years went by, the new station gradually faced the same problems the other one had experienced. It, too, became a club, and its rescue work became less and less of a priority. The few members who remained dedicated to lifesaving began another station. History continued to repeat itself; and if you visit that coast today

*you will find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore. Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown.*¹

And I want to ask brothers and sisters, what kind of church are we going to be? Are we going to be a country club or a rescue center? Are we going to be about our comfort, or are we going to be about rescuing lost souls? Are we going to be about getting together for a good time or are we going to be about meeting the needs of a lost and dying world?

Listen, this is nothing against our amazing facility. I am very thankful for it. It is a great tool that God has given us, and there is a great deal of wonderful ministry that has been carried on here. But our mission is not about this facility. And it is not simply about us getting together week after week. It's about getting together to worship the Lord and becoming equipped to go out and rescue those who are drowning in their sin. And that, ultimately, is what following Jesus is all about. And so I want to finish the message by simply going back to what I asked at the beginning. Are you willing to go all in to follow Jesus? To everyone in this room today, Jesus says, "Follow me." What is your response?

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¹ MacArthur, John (2001). Pg. 111-112. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, Chicago, IL: Moody Press