




Going Fishing

Matthew 4:12-25

After being tested in the wilderness (*Matthew 4:1-11*), Jesus began his public ministry.¹

Choosing a Home Base

Read *Matthew 4:12-17*. Jesus' hometown was Nazareth in Galilee, but he established his home base for ministry in Capernaum, located on the northern shore of the Sea (lake) of Galilee (*4:13*). The Jews in Judea looked down on Galilee,² but Matthew says Jesus' location in Galilee is a fulfillment of prophecy (*4:13-16*).³ A "great light" has dawned with the coming of Jesus.

 "Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near'" (*4:17, NIV*).⁴

Calling Fishermen

Read *Matthew 4:18-22*. These verses record Jesus' calling of four of his disciples – Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John.⁵ These men were all fishermen who were engaged in their work when Jesus called them. Jesus said, "Come, follow me" (*4:19*).



1. How would you describe the four fishermen's response to Jesus' call? What did they do to follow Jesus? What attitude is evident? (*4:20, 22*)⁶
2. Peter later told Jesus, 'We have left everything to follow you' (*19:27*). Are *all* of Jesus' followers called to leave everything to follow him? If not, why not? If so, in what sense?⁷

¹ Matthew moves directly to Jesus' ministry in Galilee after John the Baptist was arrested (*4:12*). The Gospel of John indicates that Jesus spent significant time in Judea and Galilee prior to John's arrest (*John 1:29-4:3*).

² Galilee was different from Judea geographically, racially, politically, culturally, linguistically and religiously. Judea and Galilee were separated by non-Jewish territories, including despised Samaria. The Galilean population was mixed and more open to Hellenistic (Greek) influence. Judean Jews viewed Galilean Jews as less sophisticated. They made fun of the Galileans' distinctive dialect. Judean Jews viewed Galilean Jews as lax in their observance of proper religious ritual.

³ Matthew quotes part of Isaiah 9:1-2 which flows into the prophecy of a child born who would be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (*9:6*). Jesus of Galilee is the promised Messiah (Christ)!

⁴ To 'repent' is to turn away from sin (attitudes and behaviors opposed to God's authority and moral will) and turn toward God in faith and obedience. The call to repent is connected to the coming of the 'kingdom of heaven.' While the full realization of the kingdom is future, it 'has come near' because the King (Jesus) has come.

⁵ Three of these disciples (Peter, James & John) became especially close to Jesus (*Matthew 17:1; 26:37*). Matthew later lists all twelve disciples: "Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector [and writer of this Gospel]; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him" (*Matthew 10:2-4*).

⁶ John 1:36-42 indicates that Peter and Andrew had followed Jesus at an earlier time, but they apparently returned to their fishing work. Anyway, their response to Jesus' call is still impressive.

⁷ These fishermen left their normal work and families, and *literally* followed Jesus. Their place in history is special. Their example is instructive, but it certainly does not mean every Christian (follower of Christ) is called to leave their job and family and become a 'full-time' minister! However, every believer is called to relinquish (give up) control of everything to God. Every believer should put God first, and be *willing* to leave or give up what God clearly directs.

3. Jesus said, "I will send you out to fish for people" (4:19, NIV).⁸ What do you think Jesus meant by this figure of speech?



These fishers of fish would become fishers of people. Jesus Christ, *the* Fisher of people, called these men to join him in his work – "catching people" for the kingdom of heaven.

4. Are all Christians (followers of Christ) supposed to be "fishers of people?" If not, why not? If so, in what way?

Casting the Net⁹

Read Matthew 4:23-25. These verses provide a summary of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee.

5. What did Jesus do in his ministry in Galilee? (4:23)



Jesus' ministry attracted many people. News about him spread throughout Galilee and beyond (4:24). Large crowds of people from across the region "followed" Jesus (4:25).

6. Based on verses 23-24, why do you think so many people were attracted to Jesus' ministry? Do you think the crowds "followed" Jesus in the same way the four fishermen "followed" Jesus? Explain.¹⁰
7. Why do you think Jesus healed and delivered people? (Matthew 9:35-36; 14:14; 8:16-17)¹¹

📖 "...the kingdom of heaven has come near" (4:17).

Reflection/Application

- Are you in the crowd of people who is interested in Jesus? Do you need to get closer to him? Do you need to personally commit to follow him by trusting in him as Savior and Lord?
- Brothers & sisters, are you following Jesus with all your heart? In what ways are you involved in "fishing for people?" Reflect on what it means to follow Jesus, and daily commit to do it.

⁸ Literally, 'I will make you fishers (*halieis*) of men.' Though said to Peter & Andrew, it also applied to James & John.

⁹ 'Casting the net' is Jay's metaphor for Jesus' ministry among the crowds. When a fisher casts a net, not all of the fish in the vicinity are caught, and not all of the fish caught are 'keepers.' In Jesus' 'parable of the net' (Matthew 13:47-50), the fishermen 'collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away.' The point of Jay's metaphor is this: Jesus' public ministry was like a wide casting of the net. Many people were attracted to Jesus' ministry, and heard the 'good news of the kingdom,' but only a portion of the crowd became true and faithful followers of Jesus.

¹⁰ The crowds that followed Jesus were 'amazed' and 'astonished' at his ministry, and many praised God for it (7:29; 9:8; 15:30-31; 22:33), but that does not mean they committed their lives to Jesus like the four fishermen did.

¹¹ In one sense, Jesus healed people because 'he had compassion on them' (9:36; 14:14). But Jesus' ministry of healing and deliverance also revealed his identity and authority. Jesus 'drove out the spirits...and healed all the sick' to fulfill prophecy (8:16-17). Jesus was the Suffering Servant who would die for our sin and arise from the dead, thus providing the way of salvation from the effects of sin, including sickness and demonic oppression. Jesus is the Messiah who will establish his perfect kingdom in which there is 'no more death or mourning or crying or pain' (Revelation 21:4). For Jay's thoughts on physical sickness, health and healing, see 'Health' under *Life Matters* on the ICF website.