

New Series: The Sermon on the Mount: Kingdom Living 101

Main Idea: In Matthew 4:12-25 we learn three radical things about the King.

- I. The King preached a radical message (12-17).
 - A. He talked about hope.
 - B. He talked about God’s kingdom.
 1. There is a King.
 2. There is a rival.
 3. The King is reclaiming what belongs to Him.
 - C. He talked about change.
 1. The gospel requires repentance.
 2. The gospel requires faith.
 - II. The King called for a radical response (18-22).
 - A. He chose Simon and Andrew (18-20).
 1. To be a disciple you must be willing to leave your past.
 2. To be a disciple you must be willing to follow Jesus.
 3. To be a disciple you must be willing to fish for men.
 - B. He chose James and John (21-22).
 1. To follow Jesus you must believe His message.
 2. To follow Jesus you must know Him as a person.
 - III. The King introduces the radical nature of His kingdom (23-25).
- Take Inventory: Two questions to consider...
1. Are you following the King?
 2. Are you living for His kingdom?

Scripture Reading: Matthew 4:12-25

I was a young boy struggling with doubts and fears about eternity one day, and filled with hope and assurance the next. What made the difference? *He did.*

I have seen young men walk into my study overwhelmed with the pain of regret, broken over foolish decisions made, then to leave my study with joy in their hearts and a purpose in their steps again. What made the difference? *He did.*

I have seen couples in despair, their marriages crumbling. But that all changed. Oh, they still have problems but they’re in the race for the long haul once again and they’re experiencing real joy for the first time ever. What made the difference? *He did.*

Who is *He*? He is the King.

When the King enters a person’s life, things change. Not a little either. He revolutionizes lives. No matter how bad things are, when He comes He brings transforming power and we are never the same again. With Him is life that is abundant and eternal.

You say, “Why then do so many Christians struggle in their lives?”

There are many reasons, of which I would like to address one, perhaps the most fundamental of all. Jesus changes lives—that’s a 100% guarantee. The problem is, however, that many who claim to know Him really don’t know Him. They’ve prayed a prayer to receive “Jesus,” they’ve been baptized in the name of “Jesus,” but the Jesus they received and to whom they declared allegiance is not the Jesus of the Bible.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a related message, see sermon on Mark 1:14-20 preached at WBC on 5/23/04.

It's a tragic reality. Many people today don't know Jesus, including many people who think they do.

You say, "What don't they know about Him?"

I want to answer that in two ways. First, with a sentence that we will unpack today. Then with a sermon series that we'll launch next week.

The sentence? They don't know that *He is the King*.

The sermon series? Next week, the Lord willing, we'll begin to look at the King's inaugural address, often called Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which others have referred to as "Kingdom Living 101."

Today, to prepare for the series, we're going to look at the passage that precedes that sermon. In Matthew 4:12-25 we meet and learn three radical things about Jesus the King.

I. The King preached a radical message (12-17).

Before examining the King's radical message, which comes in verse 17², let's notice the setting for His preaching. In verse 12 Matthew says, "When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee." He's talking about the John introduced in chapter three, the John who came to prepare the world for the Messiah's arrival.

3:1-2 "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'"

Was John the Baptist's preaching successful? It depends what you mean by successful. Matthew says he ended up in prison for it. To the multitudes this must have seemed a real tragedy. At the peak of his popularity, when his ministry was really starting to make a difference and God was using him to turn countless numbers from their lives of sin, John was arrested by King Herod and thrown in prison. Eventually, due to a cruel scheme instigated by Herod's unlawful wife, Herodias, the faithful preacher was beheaded. The whole thing was a great misfortune, a waste of potential.

Or was it? It was a loss, for sure, but no waste. John fulfilled his God-given purpose. Though his years were brief he fulfilled His God-given assignment and introduced the world to the Messiah. And so, according to Matthew, after John completed this assignment, after John was put in prison, *Jesus* entered center stage.

There's a vital truth here. In the words of J. D. Jones, "God's work will never be allowed to come to a stand for a lack of workers! The Sanhedrin stoned Stephen, but after Stephen came Paul. John Hus was burned in Constance, and Savonarola was gibbeted in Florence, but after Hus and Savonarola came Martin Luther. Mary kindled fires for Protestant confessors: she burned Latimer, Ridley, Hooper, Cranmer, in the hope of burning out Protestantism with them; but God raised one after another to continue their witness... It is ever so; God buries His workmen, but carries on His work. After John comes Jesus."³

This truth would have encouraged Matthew's first readers. Matthew wrote this twenty or thirty years after Jesus returned to heaven, at a time when many Christians were going to prison for the message they preached. Matthew offers this encouraging reminder, "You are not the first and you won't be the last."

With that background, with John out of the limelight, the real story begins. After John was put in prison, *Jesus* took center stage. What did He do? Matthew says He

² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

³ J. D. Jones, p. 21.

moved north into Galilee. Why? For starters, for safety reasons. He'd been down south in Judea prior to this, where John was when arrested. But this is more than safety. By this move the King is communicating something important about the nature of His kingdom.

By the way, though this is where Matthew begins the record of Jesus' public ministry, this isn't where Jesus began His public ministry. Between verses 11 and 12 there's a gap of nearly one year, sometimes referred to as "the year of obscurity" in Jesus' life. Neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke tell us much about this year, but the fourth gospel writer does. Plug in John 1-4 at this point. Following Jesus' baptism, He spent a year ministering in both Galilee and Judea, during which time he turned water into wine at Cana, turned tables over in the temple in Jerusalem, and taught Nicodemus. On one trip from Judea to Galilee, perhaps the very trip Matthew has in mind here, Jesus went through Samaria and gave living water to the woman at the well.

What did Jesus do once in Galilee? Matthew says He left Nazareth (that's where He grew up) and went and lived in Capernaum. Why? According to Matthew, to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy, which he quotes (Isaiah 9:1-2). He's intent on spending time in "Galilee of the Gentiles, the people living in darkness," as verse 15 puts it.

And once there, says verse 17, he "began to preach." Ask the average person what they know about Jesus and they'll likely talk about Him being a miracle-worker, which He certainly was. But first, He was a preacher. The King ministered with His words, and what He said was radical. He talked about three primary subjects.

A. He talked about hope. In Mark's parallel account, Mark says that Jesus went into Galilee "proclaiming the good news of God" (Mark 1:14). Far too often preachers are known for what they are *against*. Their pulpit ministries are negative. Though Jesus stepped on toes at times, He preached a positive message. He announced *the good news of God*. The preposition "of" indicates that God is both the source and object of this good news. The message Jesus preached was both *from* God and *about* God. The gospel is indeed the best news the world has ever heard for it originated with God and is about what God has done so that sinners might experience forgiveness and new life.

Mark tells us something else that Matthew sort of assumes but doesn't state. The first recorded words of Jesus in Mark's account are these, "The time has come⁴. The kingdom of God is near (Mark 1:14)."

What "time" did He have in mind? The time the prophets foretold for centuries, the time when God would break into human history and fix the problem that began at the beginning of time, the problem of sin. It's that time that has come.

You see, on the very day when the first couple committed treason in God's world, God announced the time was coming (Gen 3:15). And as century after century passed, God in His mercy postponed final judgment, sustaining rebellious mankind in His world, all the while preparing the world for His chosen One, the Deliverer who would come to rescue sinners and judge the wicked.

"The time has come," said Jesus.⁵ The King talked about hope.

B. He talked about God's kingdom. Verse 17, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near ['at hand,' AV]." These are radical words. To speak of a kingdom at a time when

⁴ "The time is fulfilled," as the AV puts it.

⁵ Many verses in the Bible refer to "the time," the time when God would break into history and deal with sin once for all. Such as: Galatians 4:4-5; 1 Peter 1:10-12; Hebrews 1:1-2; Romans 5:6; Matthew 8:29

the Romans ruled and destroyed all rival kingdoms, this kind of talk could get you killed. But Jesus talked a lot about the kingdom, or as Matthew puts it, the “kingdom of heaven,” a phrase found only in Matthew’s gospel where it occurs 33 times. Mark and Luke refer to the “kingdom of God,” a term Matthew uses only 4 times. Matthew is writing for Jews who avoided using the name of God and would often substitute the word ‘heaven’ in place of ‘God.’

“The kingdom of heaven is the rule of God and is both a present reality and a future hope,” says the NIV Study Bible footnote. “The idea of God’s kingdom is central to Jesus’ teaching and is mentioned 50 times in Matthew alone.”⁶

So what is the kingdom of God? We’ll be thinking a lot about that question once we get into the Sermon on the Mount, but for now, consider this, three basic realities.

1. *There is a King.* If there is a kingdom there must be a king. There is a King in God’s kingdom, and the King is His Son. God has committed all authority to His Son (Matt 28:18). The Son created the universe, indeed created it for the purpose of bringing glory to Himself (Col 1:15-16). So there is one true king. However...

2. *There is a rival.* The rival tried to usurp the throne of God (Isa 14:12-14), but failed and was cast out of God’s presence. Next he tried to get others to join him in his rebellion, “Did God really say?” he asked the woman in Genesis 3. And you know the result. The King pronounced a curse on His world.

3. *The King is reclaiming what belongs to Him.* That’s why He robed Himself in human flesh and came in-cognito to Bethlehem. The King has come to reclaim what is His.

A skeptic will say, “It doesn’t look like He succeeded. The world’s still a mess.”

But that’s because the skeptic doesn’t understand *how* the King intended to reclaim what it His. When He came the first time, He intended to die. He did so to rescue sinners—that’s why we see Him dying on a cross in the climax of Matthew’s gospel.

But He made it clear at the end that He wasn’t done, that the world would see Him again (see Matthew 24-5). And so as the book ends, we see Him defeating the tomb and returning to heaven, giving His followers a mission to accomplish, “Go make disciples,” with the assurance that He’s coming a second time to eliminate rebellion forever.

You say, “Is God’s kingdom a present reality or a future hope?” It’s both. The King is ruling right now. Where? In the hearts and lives of His people. But the day is coming when the King will return and establish His reign over all the world.

Sometimes Jesus spoke of the kingdom as a present reality, such as here (“The kingdom of heaven is near”) and in Matthew 12:28 (“But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you”). At other times Jesus spoke of the kingdom as a future hope (Matthew 8:11 “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven”).

To put it another way, the question isn’t whether the King reigns, but *where*. Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come...on earth as it is in heaven.” The King is ruling right now. Where? In heaven. Where else? In the lives of His people. And at a day coming soon He will extend His reign over the whole earth, indeed, He exhorts us to pray for that day.

⁶ NIV Study Bible, p. 1440.

My friend, I'll say it as plainly as I can. If you are considering becoming a Christian, you are taking a radical even revolutionary step. You will be changing kingdoms, leaving the kingdom of darkness and entering the kingdom of light. You'll be changing allegiances, from being your own king to living to please King Jesus. You'll be saying no to sin and yes to righteousness. You'll be turning from the values of this world and choosing to live for the values of the world to come.

This brings us to a third subject in Jesus' radical message. Hope. Kingdom.

C. He talked about change. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

In Mark's account Jesus says, "Repent and believe the good news." The King's message is good news, yes, but it's not status quo news. Jesus didn't preach a feel-good-about-yourself message, but a life-transforming message. He talked a lot about personal *change*, as we'll see in the Sermon on the Mount. Here He makes it clear that His good news message, His gospel, requires two things.

1. *The gospel requires repentance.* If there is a King who is reclaiming His world, what must sinners do who desire to be right with Him? "Repent," Jesus said. To repent means more than to feel sorry for your sin. To repent is to renounce your sin, to repudiate it, to get rid of it.

Granted, the King provides the power to do that, not you. But you must be willing.

Like Zachaeus was. "Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor,"—for a man who once loved money, as did Zachaeus, that's repentance. "The things I once counted gain I now count but loss for Christ,"—that too is repenting. "Burn them," said a convert in the Welsh Revival, handing to his minister three gambling-clubs' membership tickets—that is repenting.⁷

Please realize that a person cannot enter God's kingdom without repenting. That doesn't mean a person must change his life in order to be saved. It does mean he must be willing to be changed for that's exactly what Jesus will do when He enters.

But even repenting isn't enough. It's not sufficient to turn from sin. A person must turn *to* something, to the right something.

2. *The gospel requires faith.* "Repent and believe," said Jesus in Mark's account. That indicates that faith is lacking apart from accompanying repentance. It also indicates that repentance is incomplete without faith. "Believe the good news!" Jesus said. The good news is that God has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves, ultimately at the cross. Believe it!

This is a radical message, isn't it? Quite frankly, it's one not preached in many churches. But listen to Jesus. He called people to turn from sin and turn to Him in faith. If a person doesn't turn *from* his sin, it indicates he hasn't really turned *to* Christ. When a person truly turns to Christ, there will be a lasting obvious change in the person. The person didn't do it. Christ did it. When a person turns from his sin to Christ, the Savior changes that person. He cancels the penalty of sin immediately and then begins to break the power of sin that previously enslaved him.

He can do that because He is the King. What's true of the King? First, the King preached a radical message.

II. The King called for a radical response (18-22).

⁷ J. D. Jones, p. 22.

In the next section Matthew records two examples of the impact Jesus' radical message had. In both scenarios Jesus called for a drastic response.

A. He chose Simon and Andrew (18-20). "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."

Please note that Jesus walked. There were no cars or planes for Him. He walked literally hundreds and hundreds of miles in His three year ministry as an itinerant preacher.

And here we see His methodology. He made disciples. He selected them and then worked through them. Don't miss that He chose His men. They didn't choose Him, not initially. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit (John 15:16)."

He also went to where His people were. This King didn't stay in the palace. He went to where His subjects were, in this case, to the job-site of two brothers, Simon [later to be renamed Peter] and Andrew.

And Matthew says that Jesus *saw* these two men. Don't miss His sovereign gaze in that word, for the King is still seeing and seeking His disciples.

Then He spoke to them words that teach us just how radical the response is to become His disciple. "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." To identify with this King three things must happen.

1. *To be a disciple you must be willing to leave your past.* "Come," He told them. Remember, these men were fishermen. They didn't fish for recreation but as an occupation. Come. With that word Jesus asks them to sign on the dotted line. Are you with me or not? Are you willing to let go of everything you've considered important in your life until now?

You say, "Do I have to get rid of everything to be Jesus' disciple?"

No. Only if He says so. But you must be willing. He called these two men to leave their jobs. He may ask you to do the same, or He may ask you to stay where you are and represent Him there. But things will be different. You will be different.

2. *To be a disciple you must be willing to follow Jesus.* "Come, *follow Me*," He said. Sometimes we complicate things too much. We view discipleship as a ten week course. Jesus made it simple, though not easy, and highly personal. *Follow Me*. To follow you must yield, submit, and obey. Follow *Me* means it's very personal. We're not adding religion to our lives. We are following a person who is now our Teacher, Master, Savior, and King.

Have you ever been in a car caravan in heavy traffic when you were *not* in the lead? "Why is he going *that* way! Where is he taking us now!" It's not easy to follow someone else, especially if the way he chooses doesn't make sense to us. If you want to be Jesus' disciple, you must be willing to follow Him. Wherever He leads.

We need to put Simon and Andrew's decision into perspective. This may be the first time we see them in Mathew's gospel, but it wasn't the first time these men met Jesus. You'll find that event in John 1, when months before this day John the Baptist pointed Andrew to Jesus, saying, "Look! the Lamb of God!" And Andrew found Simon and brought him to Jesus.

In the months that followed these brothers heard Jesus' teaching and saw His miracles. And now Jesus approaches them. On the job site. Now it's decision time.

My friend, it's one thing to be fascinated with Jesus, even to agree with Him and appreciate Him. But it's another to come and *follow Him*. And that's the King's invitation. Indeed, His inviting command. Come, *follow Me*.

3. *To be a disciple you must be willing to fish for men.* "And I will make you fishers of men." Remember, these men were fishermen. This is something they know a lot about. Fishing.

So what did Jesus do? He uses what they know to show them what He's going to do with them. They know about fishing for fish. He's going to make them into fishers of men.

Interesting, isn't it? He takes their abilities and says He's going to transform them for kingdom purposes. As He does with us.

What has the King given you? Hands that can fix things? Then use those hands to bring people to Him. Were you a fighter? Now be a soldier for Him. This is where following Him takes us. We bring others to Him.

You say, "I can't fish for men."

That may be true, but don't miss the verb "make." Jesus says, "Come, follow Me, and *I will make you* fishers of men." So what He calls a person to do He enables the person to do.

To fish for fish is to do what you've always done. To fish for men is to get on board with the Master's plan to reach lost people. To fish for fish is to do what matters in the here and now. To fish for men is to engage in a task that will matter for all eternity.

How did Simon and Andrew respond? Verse 18—"At once [note the powerful effect of the King's spoken word] they left their nets [they left the familiar, their very livelihood] and followed him [they're on a new course in life; where He leads they will go]."

The problem for many is that they try to keep their nets, to add Jesus to their already cluttered lives. That's a sure way to live a frustrated life, to live with two masters. Not these two brothers. They left it all and followed Jesus.

Matthew includes a second example of how King Jesus called for a radical response.

B. He chose James and John (21-22). "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."

This response is even more shocking in some ways. The first set of brothers left their nets. These two brothers left their dad sitting in the boat.

I'm sure they loved their father. The point is, they love Jesus more.

Let that sink in. These sons of Zebedee put Jesus above their father, above the family business, above the security of staying in the comfort zone, above *everything*. Indeed, this is the radical nature of following the King. If you want to be His disciple you must love Him *supremely*. And because He is so worthy, you will do so gladly.

Some say that James and John left more than Peter and Andrew since the latter left *their nets* while the former left their father's business including boat and hired servants. Whether James and John left more or not, it's hard to say. But this we know. All four men took the King at His word and left all they had.

Why would somebody do that? To take drastic steps (and these are drastic steps) there must be a solid motivation. And there was. Two motivating factors.

1. *To follow Jesus you must believe His message.* Is what Jesus said true or is it not? Is He the King, the Son of the Living God, or is He not? Is He the way, the truth, and the life, or is He not? Is He going to establish His kingdom, reward His people and judge the unbelieving, or is He not? In order to follow Him, you must *believe His message*. You must confess, “Yes, I believe His message.”

But it’s more than merely an intellectual affirmation.

2. *To follow Jesus you must know Him as a person.* He who is the King of the universe must become *your King*. You must receive Him personally and give your allegiance to Him.

Quite frankly, if you don’t believe He is the King, you can’t follow Him. It’s not that your assessment is right, but until you believe He is who He is, you cannot follow Him. You *will* not follow Him. You will merely do as multitudes have done, pay Him lip-service that lasts until tribulation comes or the cares of this world recapture your heart.

What is it the redeemed multitudes in heaven are crying? Why have they followed him to the loss of family and reputation, to ridicule and hardship, even to burning stakes? Hear their testimony, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!”

He is *worthy*. For James, following Jesus took him to prison and death by sword (Acts 12:2). For John it was exile on Patmos. For Peter it was crucifixion in Rome. But there was no regret. They followed Him because they counted the cost and considered Him *worthy*.

Who else can offer peace and joy that never fades, and the assurance of life beyond the grave? Only one person. The One who is worthy. *Jesus the King*.

You say, “But I’m a sinner. How can I ever spend eternity with a holy God?”

It’s because of what the King did for you, as the rest of Matthew’s gospel shows. This King paid a ransom payment for His subjects (20:8). The price He paid? “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree,” writes Peter himself in 1 Peter 2:24.

And so the King calls to us today, “Repent, for the kingdom is near. Come, follow Me.”

To leave all and follow this King is no sacrifice. It’s not. It makes perfect sense to trade in the pleasures of sin that last for a short season to gain the eternal treasure He offers. I love the words of the martyr Jim Elliot, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

But before we’re ready to hear the Sermon on the Mount, there’s something else Matthew wants us to know about King Jesus. One, He preached a radical message. Two, He called for a radical response.

III. The King introduces the radical nature of His kingdom (23-25).

Here’s how He did it, verses 23-25, “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming 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.”

Notice Jesus' actions. He taught and preached and healed. Notice where He did it. Throughout Galilee.

That's like saying, "Where the country-bumpkins live." Why go there? What political advantage would this bring to a king? But such is the radical nature of this King's kingdom.

And it's not just Galilee. Word about Him spread even to Gentile territory, says Matthew, to Syria (that's Gentile territory), and the Decapolis (a league of free cities with Greek culture).

"Jesus worked where Judaism touched paganism, where the Nation intersected the nations, where light met darkness. Jesus lived among the marginal peoples, on the frontier," writes Frederick Dale Bruner.⁸

Now notice the effect. According the last verse of the fourth chapter, "Large crowds...followed him." So the crowds are following Jesus. Is that a good thing? What do you do with crowds?

Notice the first verse of the fifth chapter. "Now when He saw the crowds." Beginning next week we'll see what Jesus did when the crowds came. He preached a sermon, a very special sermon as we'll see.

I hope you come back. I hope you invite your friends too, for we need this sermon. We need it because we have a problem today. It's basically the same problem Jesus faced. The problem of the crowds.

Millions of people go to church in America. When asked, they identify themselves as Christian. They are Christ-followers, they say. They've been born again, they say. But they live their lives in the same way the non-Christ-followers in this nation live. They tell lies at work. They make excuses for their anger. They look at pornography. They refuse to forgive.

What would Jesus say to them? We need not wonder, for in Matthew 5-7 He is going to talk plainly to us about lying and anger and lust and the refusal to forgive. And He will finish His sermon with this sober warning, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven."

Take Inventory: Two questions to consider...

1. *Are you following the King?* Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice and they follow Me (John 10:27)." Are you exhibiting a hunger to learn and then live by His word? This is a mark of a true sheep. Such a person loves to hear and follow the Shepherd. Are you following the King?

2. *Are you living for His kingdom?* In this sermon Jesus will say, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness," and that if we did "all these things will be given to you as well (Matt 6:33)." Are you doing that? Are you using your money, time, home, *everything* for kingdom purposes, or for earthly pleasures?

Have you left your nets? Is there anything in your life that's competing with Jesus right now? It could be a good thing, but it's become an idol for you. I invite you to leave your nets today.

He is worthy, my friend. The real Jesus is worthy. Come, follow Him.

⁸ Bruner, *The Christbook: Matthew 1-12*, p. 119.