

# Matthew 4 - God is with us and things begin to change!

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're looking today at Matthew chapter 4 verses 12 to 25. Our series is entitled Following the Way of Jesus, a series on Matthew's Gospel, and our message for today is entitled God is with us and things begin to change.

Verse 12 says of Matthew chapter 4, When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee, leaving Nazareth. He went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun, and Naphtali, to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah.

Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea along 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, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. 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, said Jesus, and I will make you fishers of men. At once they left their nets and followed him.

[ 1 : 15 ] 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, and immediately they left their boat and their father, and they followed him.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. 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 paralysed, and he healed them.

Large crowds from Galilee and Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan, followed him. Amen, and the Lord will bless to us the reading of his word.

You cannot have a genuine encounter with God and remain the same. If God is with us, then things inevitably begin to change. Archbishop Fulton Sheen of New York was at a dinner party along with Richard Burton, a well-known Shakespearean actor.

The host of the dinner party invited each of them to recite Psalm 23 for the audience. Cardinal Dolan writes the following about their recitation.

[ 2 : 31 ] Richard Burton did so with the precision, the cadence, and the drama one would expect from a Shakespearean actor, and the guests applauded vigorously.

Fulton Sheen then read the psalm with obvious devotion, meaning, and depth, and the guests remained in reverential silence. The host commented, The actor knew the psalm.

The preacher knew the shepherd. Knowing the shepherd, knowing God, is more than merely knowing about him. John Wesley discovered this.

Born and brought up as he was in a Church of England, Mansard-Epworth, having godly parents in Samuel and Susanna Wesley, and having gone through ordination and served as a missionary to the Indians in Georgia, USA, Wesley despaired of salvation.

I went to America, he said, to convert the Indians, but oh, who shall convert me? And in May 1738, John, seeking for the grace of God, ended in a meeting house in Aldersgate Street in London.

[ 3 : 37 ] He wrote in his journal about the now famous account of his conversion. In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans.

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, in Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given to me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

When people meet God, when God is with us, things begin to change. And we see that in this passage before us in Matthew 4, 12-25.

The first person we noticed who changed was John the Baptist. Things changed for John the Baptist. Notice I didn't say they changed for the better.

Of course, things will change for the better in time when you meet God. But like for all of us, life has its ups and downs, and God has not promised us an easy, trouble-free life.

[ 4 : 52 ] Indeed, at this point, John's star was waning after the heady days of the crowds gathering to hear him preach, and the many who were baptized with a view to repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

But now, as he knew himself, he must decrease. Jesus has come, and John is the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is time for his ministry to come to an end.

Jesus must increase, for his time is coming to its zenith. After years of faithful service to God, in preparation for the making way of the Saviour, John ends up in prison for offending the king's wife, and ultimately, we know he will lose his head as a result of a rash promise made by Herod at the birthday party of his wife.

John's fate made me reflect on the works of Jack's in Shakespeare, as you like it. All the world's a stage, says Jack, and all the men and women merely players.

They have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts. He's been seven ages. At first the infant mewling and puking in the nurse's arms, and then the whining schoolboy with his satchel, and the shining face, mourning face, creeping like a snail, unwillingly to school.

[ 6 : 22 ] And then the lover, sighing like a furnace with a woeful ballad, made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard, jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel, seeking the bubble reputation, even in the cannon's mouth.

And then the justice in fair round belly with good cap unlined, with eyes severe and beard a formal cut, full of wise sores in modern instances. And so he plays his part.

The sixth age shifts into the lean and slippered pantaloon, with spectacles on nose and pouch on side, his useful hose, well saved, a world too wide for his shrunk, shrank, and his big manly voice, turning again toward childish treble, pipes and whistles in his sound.

Last scene of all, that ends the strange eventful history, his second childishness and mere oblivion, sun's teeth, sun's eyes, sun's taste, sun's everything.

What a picture that is of degeneration, of deterioration, of getting old, losing one's faculties and dying.

[ 7 : 40 ] Shakespeare knew it. John the Baptist knew that it was his time because everything must change. It's right that the Ecclesiastes says, there is a time, everything, for everything under the sun, a time to be born and a time to die.

And it was John's time. Things were changing. But the one thing that doesn't change is God. God does not change. God's promises to us in Jesus do not change.

So however unfavourably or favourably the changes that we experience might be, we can remember that we can endure change, as Max Lucado put it, by pondering God's permanence.

Remembering that God is eternal and is there for us and will never disappoint us or let us down. Things changed for John the Baptist.

Secondly, things changed for Jesus. When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, we're told, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali, to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah, land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people living in darkness have seen a great light.

[ 8 : 57 ] On those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. John's imprisonment was the sign indicator to Jesus that his time of public ministry had dawned.

The forerunner had left the stage, but now Jesus became centre stage. And all this was ordained by God, who over 600 years before, through the prophet Isaiah, had predicted that the land that was in darkness would see a great light.

Jesus was the great light. Galilee of the Gentiles was going to experience a great and gracious privilege as salvation came to their district and region.

And notice, Jesus was called to leave home. The loving, quiet confines of the domestic scene where his mother, brother and sisters all lived, and the manual work that had seen him continue in his father's business in the carpenter's shop.

He owed his livelihood, and he owed his life to that wonderful domestic environment. But now he was leaving it behind in order to let the world know that God's light was shining in the darkness and salvation was coming to a land that was living in the shadow of death.

[ 10 : 13 ] Jesus was called to leave home to bring hope to the world. But Jesus was also called to preach. He brought hope to the world by preaching the good news of the kingdom of God.

And these were his words, repent for the kingdom of heaven is near. In other words, he preached exactly the same sermon as John the Baptist did. The kingdom of God was coming to earth.

God was calling citizens into his kingdom. He was calling men and women, boys and girls, to belong to his kingdom. And in order for them to have to do so, they have to repent. Remember, repentance means to stop what you're doing, to change your mind about your lifestyle, your life of sin, and to be determined to live a life for God in a way that pleases God, to repent of your sin and to believe the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ.

That's what repentance means. In order for us to meet with God, we must forsake our sin and we must turn to him. And this was the primary calling on Jesus' life.

He was called to minister the gospel of God's grace. He was not primarily called to heal the sick or to meet the needs of the poor or to work for social justice or social reform, as good and worthy as those things are.

[ 11 : 31 ] He knew, as God knows, that the only way those other things can be put in place is if men and women are first repenting of their sin and turn away from their selfishness and begin to love God and begin to love their fellow men.

In other words, when people receive the salvation that God gives, society will become a better place. Jesus' primary calling was to command people to get ready to encounter God through repentance.

We must not think, you see, of repentance as merely a negative thing, as merely having to give up certain things to turn away from those sinful indulgences which actually, if we're honest, we quite enjoy.

Yes, there is a turning around. Yes, there is a leaving of the old ways. But it is also immensely comforting to know that change is possible, that we can begin to live again, that those old regrets and those sins that we are ashamed of can be wiped clean as we turn again to God and experience the loving embrace of his salvation.

It reminds us of what C.S. Lewis once said. God does not want something from us. He simply wants us. And God will have us as we repent.

[ 12 : 51 ] God will welcome us into his kingdom as we repent. This is what Jesus preached. Things began to change for Jesus. He left home. He began to preach. But when they changed for Jesus, they began to change for the world.

The great light had come and life came in to the land of the shadow of death. So things change for John the Baptist. Things change for Jesus. But things change for the disciples.

We read in this passage, 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 make you fishers of men. 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 with their father Zebedee preparing their nets. Jesus called them and immediately they left their boat and their father and they followed him. Things change for the disciples.

[ 13 : 52 ] For example, we're told here about the change that came about as a result of people who were called by Jesus to follow him. And the first one mentioned is Simon Peter.

Now, there are lots of things we could say about Simon Peter. I love him because he's a northerner like myself. He often speaks before he puts his brain into gear like myself.

And he's often so very bold but he's not quite able to carry out all the things he commits to a bit like myself. But when you read of Simon Peter, you can't help thinking about on the other hand, his great humility, his self-awareness, his understanding that he was a sinner in need of the grace of God through Jesus Christ.

And I love that passage in Luke chapter 5 where we're told about Jesus on the lake of Gennesaret and Simon Peter and his brothers had been out all night fishing and they'd caught nothing.

And Jesus called out and said to Simon, put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch. And Simon answered, Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything.

[ 15 : 00 ] But because you say so, I will let down the nets. When they'd done so, they caught such a large number of fish that the nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

And when Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man. In other words, when Peter understood just who Jesus really is, that he understood that he could command fish to jump into his nets, that this must be none other than God Almighty who is present in the human flesh of Jesus, he said, Leave me alone, Lord.

I'm not worthy of you. I'm a sinful man. And Jesus said to Simon, Don't be afraid. From now on, you will fish for people.

In other words, Simon Peter heard the call on more than one occasion to follow Jesus and to become a fisher of men, a fisher of souls.

It wasn't just an instantaneous and, you know, thoughtless decision on his part. He wasn't being rash. He gave up his job.

[ 16 : 17 ] He gave up his home life. He gave up his comfortable life in order that he might engage with Jesus in the business of saving souls. But he did it after a full awareness of just who he was by nature, a sinner, and a full awareness of what he could become by grace as he trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for his salvation.

Simon Peter, a sinful man like the tax collector of Luke Hedin, said, God have mercy on me, a sinner.

And he was at once transformed into a saved man who would go into the world of darkness and search for souls. Things began to change for the disciples and for Simon Peter.

And then there's Andrew. Andrew is one of the four most prominent of the apostles among the twelve. And his big moment was when he called the small boy to come to Jesus with his five barley loaves and his two small fish and said, this is what we've got, Lord.

This might do it, feed in the five thousand. Well, I suspect he doubted that. But he handed them over to Jesus. He put them in Jesus' hands and then a great miracle took place.

[ 17 : 39 ] Andrew was the kind of man who brought others to Jesus. We saw that right at the beginning of John's Gospel when he was the first to call Jesus Messiah, which is why the Byzantine church calls Andrew the protocate, the first called.

In other words, they think of him as the original disciple who went to his brother Simon Peter and said, we have found the Christ. We have found the Messiah. And this Andrew was the same Andrew who brought others to Jesus.

He was the one who took the Greek who said, sir, we would see Jesus and he took him to Jesus.

Eusebius of Caesarea tells us that Andrew, this God-fearing man, his name actually comes from the Greek word anero andros, which means courageous or manly man.

And this manly man, we're told, went to be with Jesus. Eusebius of Caesarea reports that Oregon informed him that he'd preached the Gospel in Scythia, an ancient region in central Eurasia.

[ 18 : 55 ] And this tradition, along with an account of his death, is recorded in Fox's Book of Martyrs, which says that Andrew preached the Gospel to many Asiatic nations, but on his arrival at Edessa, he was taken and crucified on a cross the two ends of which were fixed transversely in the ground, hence the derivation of the term the St Andrew's Cross.

And then there was James, son of Zebedee and his brother John. Of James and particularly of John, there is much more to say, but the chief characteristic of both is that these were close companions of Jesus, particularly John, who is described as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

However, it's not always been the case that these two disciples were so gentle and mild-mannered. In fact, Mark tells us that Jesus gave these two the names Bonerges, which means sons of thunder, Mark 3, verse 19.

And the reason appears to be that there was an occasion when Jesus and his disciples were travelling through Samaria on their way to Jerusalem, looking for a place overnight for hospitality for the crowded disciples and Jesus.

But they had experienced opposition from the villagers who were Samaritans and who had a long-standing hatred of the Jews. And the text says that when the disciples, James and John, saw this, they asked the Lord, Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy them?

[ 20 : 24 ] Jesus rebuked the brothers and they went on to another village. But that kind of impulsive, angry response shows that they were perhaps a little hot-headed to say the least and that they needed to calm down and understand that Jesus was in the business of showing mercy, not in the business of punishing people who opposed him.

So James and John's response to the Samaritans reveals their fervency but also their impotent perpetuity and their anger that they could be properly called thunderous individuals.

And we can be sure that there were other times when James and John lived up to their nickname. But over time with Jesus and the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit, they tempered and they changed.

James was the first apostle to be killed in Acts 12 and verse 2 and John was the last to die of old age. Indeed, John's letters written late in his life hint that he still possessed the fervency of spirit, especially in his denunciations of apostates and deceivers, 1 John 2.22, 2 John 7 and 3 John 10.

However, it is a fervency tempered by love with 1 John alone using the word love over 40 times. So that tells us that the son of thunder became the great apostle of love.

[ 21 : 56 ] You see, you can't be with Jesus. You can't encounter God and remain the same. Now, Matthew may leave you with the impression on first reading that this was Jesus' first encounter with these four men.

However, John records that some of the twelve, at least, Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathaniel had been with Jesus in his earliest ministry. And Jesus had known his disciples for some time, as we already saw from Luke chapter 5.

Thus, their decision to follow Jesus was not hastily made. And it reminds us that Jesus will not force himself on any of us, that a decision to follow Jesus must be freely and readily given, but once taken, it will not be without cost, but neither will it be without reward.

So these disciples, they became followers of Jesus. But also, they became fishers of men. We've already talked about that briefly, but what that really means is that these people who were experienced fishermen, that was their profession, they were given a new call and their call was to catch souls.

not men, but souls. Not simply to build a movement, but actually to build a new community of people who were born again of the Spirit of God and who become citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

[ 23 : 32 ] So the great light, Jesus, was coming into the world to shine light into the valley of the shadow of death. He was coming on a rescue mission to save souls and the disciples were called to be engaged in that process.

The terminology that Jesus uses is really interesting. Had there been electricians, he might have said, I will come and make you electricians of men or I will come and make you farmers of men or I will come and make you, engineers of men.

but he said fishes of men because this was something they understood and something that they were taught and trained to do. And it reminds us that Jesus values our life and our experience, where we've been, what we've done, what we've learned, what we've discovered and that none of it is wasted.

He can use all of those previous experiences as a means by which we can influence others for the Kingdom of God. So never despair that you have a lowly position in society and you have a lowly and unimportant role in life.

Jesus can use you and your experiences, no matter how lowly, to influence and to change people from the inside out. So these disciples were to be with Jesus and by being with Jesus they would become like him and by becoming like him they would begin to do what he did.

[ 25 : 05 ] catch precious souls in the net of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus wants us to be passionate for the things he is passionate about. He said, I have come to seek and to save that which was lost and he said that when he was catching Zacchaeus for the Kingdom of Heaven and every time you and I engage in sharing the Gospel and we catch people for the Kingdom of Heaven we are doing what Jesus did, seeking and saving that which was lost and Jesus says that there is joy among the angels of Heaven over one sinner that repents.

So we are engaged in a great business that pleases the angels in Heaven and honours God and does the work that Jesus calls us to do. And we are reminded that Jesus primarily wants our companionship and commitment.

Mark 3.14 says he appointed 12 that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach. So begin with companionship and then begin to commit to doing his work.

So the disciples changed when they met Jesus. Things changed for Jesus himself when he was called to begin his ministry and things changed for John the Baptist when his ministry was coming to an end.

But finally I want you to see from this passage that things changed for the world as well. Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

[ 26 : 38 ] 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 in the paradise and he healed them.

Large crowd from Galilee the Decapolis Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him. What a change what a transformation took place as people encountered Jesus as this great light shone in those northern regions even as far as Syria and in these in the regions to the east to across the Jordan.

Notice that there was a continuity between the message of Jesus and the ministry of John. They both preached repentance. John passed the baton on to Jesus after he was imprisoned and Jesus carried on and preached exactly the same message.

But there was discontinuity too. The impact was different. There was a clear distinction between the ministries of John and Jesus and John himself knew that because he described that distinction in Matthew 3, 11 and 12 when he tells us that though he baptized with water for repentance Jesus would baptize with the people with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

So this was a dawning of a new era for the world. The centuries-old fulfillment of prophecy in Isaiah 9 would come true. The people living in darkness would see a great light and there would be a great impact and a new government would be set up and the government would be upon his shoulders and remember Isaiah said the one who was coming would be called Emmanuel.

[ 28 : 18 ] He would be Prince of Peace. He would be Mighty God. And of course Ezekiel foresaw this great transformation as the transformation of a dead and decaying army in a valley that would become a valley full of living beings.

The Valley of Dry Bones as Ezekiel prophesied to the breath would lead to a resurrection of those dead people who would come to life and become an exceeding great army.

And this is a picture of the new birth. That's why Jesus said to Ezekiel sorry to Nicodemus are you Israel's teacher and do you not know such things?

He should know that you have to be born again to enter the kingdom of God. All the prophets spoke of that. That the Messiah would come and breathe new life into dry bones and men and women would live and become an exceeding great army in the kingdom of God.

This was the impact that Jesus was having. And there were other things going on of course. There was the healing of bodily diseases. There was the transformation of people's lives.

[ 29 : 30 ] People who were suffering severe pain. Those who were paralyzed. Those who were having epileptic seizures. These people were transformed by the presence of Jesus.

Had the demon possessed? Had their demons delivered from them because of the presence of Jesus? These were all sign indicators that the message Jesus preached and the claims that he made were authenticated by the Spirit of God in these great miracles.

Preaching, healing, the deliverance, the power given to combat demonic forces. All of them were on display here. But all of them demonstrating that Jesus really was wonderful counsellor, mighty God, eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

The valley of the shadow of death was seeing this great light and nothing would be the same again. And so we've learned today that if you encounter God in Jesus Christ things will change.

Nothing can remain the same. And it's a reminder to us that it is not enough for us merely to know about Jesus, not enough for us merely to know the stories or to have read the Bible or to go to church.

[ 30 : 47 ] We have to encounter God in Jesus Christ. Years ago, we sang a hymn and it had these words, I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.

Though none go with me, I still will follow, no turning back, no turning back. And the world behind me, the cross before me, no turning back, no turning back.

Things change and things have to change when you encounter God in Jesus Christ. And there has to be a definite decision to follow Jesus.

I started with the story of John Wesley and his conversion. As we draw to a close today, I want you to think about this something John Wesley said with respect to the Bible. He says, I want to know one thing, the way to heaven, how to land safe on that happy shore.

God himself has condescended to teach the way for this end he came from heaven. He has written it down in a book. Give me that book at any price. Give me the book of God.

[ 31 : 53 ] Wesley knew the value of the scripture because the scripture taught him about Jesus. Jesus tells us that the way we encounter God, the way we see God is through him.

I am the way, the truth and the life. He said, no man comes to the Father but by me. And one of his disciples said, well, show us the Father and we'll be satisfied. And Jesus said, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father.

You encounter God in the face of Jesus Christ. But let us remember this as we close. There were many in that large crowd who heard Jesus up in the north who did not believe in him.

They listened to what he had to say. They watched what he did. They saw the miracles. They received the temporary blessing. But they did not accept the one who spoke and who healed, whose words and works not only give blessing but give eternal life.

How tragic to have come so close to the Saviour and not be saved. Think of Judas. He was with Jesus.

[ 32 : 58 ] He heard about Jesus. He never became like Jesus. He saw the miracles that Jesus did but they never truly changed his heart and he went to hell. John Bunyan said, I perceived that there was a gateway to hell from the gate of heaven.



It would be a tragedy if today we've heard about Jesus. We've seen what Jesus can do for us and yet we walk out of this place.

We stop listening to this sermon and we are not saved. So let us stand today to make a decision to follow Jesus. No turning back. Let us say, even if no one go with me, I will still follow.

No turning back. The world behind me, the cross before me, no turning back. Let that be our resolve. Let us pray. Amen. Amen.