

# The Ministry of the Kingdom

Well great to see you all this morning. If you have a bible, go with me to **Matthew 4**. If you're new, we are three weeks into a teaching series where we are just walking straight through the **book of Matthew** in the bible. And if you're new to the *bible*, Matthew is the **first extended account** we get *in* the bible of the life and ministry of Jesus. It reads sort of like a snapshot of about 3-4 years of Jesus' life. So we're taking what will likely be the better part of the next 2-3 years, on and off, to study the life and ministry of Jesus.

And what we're going to discover—in fact, what we've *already* discovered—is that **the central idea** in the book of Matthew is something called “the **kingdom of God**.” Which is what Jesus calls *God's way of doing things* in the world. **The kingdom is a place and a sphere where what God wants to happen, always happens.** That is *the thing* that Jesus talks about more than he talks about *anything else*. It was a big deal to him. If Jesus were to do a TED talk, it would be on the kingdom of God. If he had an Instagram bio—which, let's be real, he likely wouldn't—but *if he did*, it would no doubt say *something* about the kingdom of God. This is *the main thing* he talks about in all the gospels, but specifically for our purposes, the gospel of Matthew. So if you're new to Jesus, or trying to figure out what you think about Jesus—this is a really great place for you to start.

But if that's what Jesus spent most of his time *talking* about, today we're going to get into what he spent his time *doing*. **We're going to press pause on the conceptual about the kingdom of God and get into a little more of the practical.** What exactly is the *ministry* of the kingdom? We're going to get an overview today of the types of things Jesus spent his time doing during his ministry on earth. And **this is not only important because it's what Jesus spent his time doing—it's important because it also gives us a picture of the types of things we should be doing** within the kingdom. Assuming that we want to be a part of the kingdom—and I'm assuming that at least some of us here today do—**what exactly are we called to do?** What does day-to-day life consist of in the kingdom of God?

I've got a **pastor friend in another city** who offers a class to his church every couple months. And the title of the class is *Cool, I'm a Christian...what do I do now?* And I love that question so much, because I think it's a question that a lot of followers of Jesus have: *I'm a Christian...what do I do now?* What types of things should I be spending my time and energy on *within* the kingdom of God? I think **this passage helps to answer that question.**

So let's take a look and see what the ministry of the kingdom is all about. We'll pick it up in **Matthew 4**, starting in v. 12:

*[12] Now when he [Jesus] heard that John [that's John the Baptist, from our passage a couple weeks ago] 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—*

So before he gets into the nitty gritty of it all, Matthew offers an **editorial note** about Jesus' geographical *location* as he begins his ministry. It says that once John the baptist is *arrested*—he'll tell us later in Matthew about why *that happened*—Jesus went to the ancient region of *Galilee*. Specifically, Jesus would make his "**home base**" in a town called *Capernaum*. So best we can tell, Jesus didn't have a "home" the way most of us think of it, but Capernaum was probably the closest thing he had to a *hometown* or a *homebase*. **But Matthew isn't just telling us geographical details here—he's also showing us something else.** Something far more important. Look at v. 14:

(this all happened...) *[14] so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:* (and then he quotes the passage he's referring to) *[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."* *[17] From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

So this is **a little more than Matthew just** saying "hey Jesus lived here." Matthew is also pointing out to his audience that Jesus *taking up residence* here was a fulfillment of **Old Testament prophecy** *about* the coming king. In the book of Isaiah, we're told that the people "dwelling in darkness," in this particular location in fact, will "see a great light." These regions—Zebulun and Naphtali—were seen as two of the darkest, most evil, most sinful regions in the ancient world. **Think of them like a Las Vegas or Amsterdam—but far worse.** And *that* is where Jesus starts his ministry. Things are happening just as Isaiah said they would happen.

So Matthew's point is that **Jesus is the light, and he has arrived to bring light into darkness.** That's his overall mission. That's **what Jesus came to do.** From *there*, the rest of our passage is going to unpack for us *how he went about* that mission. What it looked like to bring light into darkness, *practically* speaking. And here's why I say that also

applies to *us*: in the very next chapter of Matthew, Jesus is actually going to begin referring to *his disciples* as the “the light of the world.”<sup>1</sup> Which means that now *his* mission—bringing light into darkness—has now been expanded to *us*, his followers. We are now called to fulfill the same mission as Jesus. So **I want us to examine the types of things Jesus did, but I want us to use them as a guide to determine the types of things we are called to do as well.**

I think we could slice up the ministry of the kingdom into **three categories**. There are three primary things Jesus did to bring light into darkness, therefore we are called to do as well. **The first way Jesus brought light into darkness was through...**

## Discipling

Take a look at v. 18-22 with me:

*[18] 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. Fishing was a very common and often very lucrative business in this region. [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.*

So Jesus walks up to **two different sets of brothers**, who are all fishermen, and calls them to “follow” him. “Following” someone in that day was shorthand for becoming that person’s *disciple*. Jesus was a rabbi, and **what rabbis did was that they called disciples**. We don’t have a great modern equivalent for the word “disciple,” but probably the closest to it today would be a word like **apprentice**. **The idea was that if you were a disciple, you would spend the vast majority of your time apprenticing yourself to your rabbi. You would follow him around constantly, and your goal in life was to learn how to do everything precisely like he did it.** The goal was to *talk* like your rabbi, to *think* like your rabbi, to *read the Scriptures* like your rabbi, and to *live* just like your rabbi.

And to become someone’s *disciple* was **a very prestigious thing** in Jesus’ day. Usually it was reserved for the best and the brightest, the most well-connected—*those*

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:14

were the people who could apprentice themselves to a rabbi. **The fact that Simon, Andrew, James, and John were fishermen** meant that they most likely were *not* the best and the brightest. They were more on the “common” end of the spectrum, to put it nicely. Which helps explain why, when Jesus calls them to be his *disciples* in the story, they “**immediately leave everything**” and follow him. **It was a big deal for a rabbi like Jesus to be calling them to follow him, and they respond accordingly.**

But evidently, **a central part of how Jesus will go about bringing “light into darkness” is by calling people to “follow him,” and therefore to become his disciples.** By inviting men and women to apprentice themselves to him, and learn how to go about life like *Jesus* went about life. One scholar points out that **from this point on in the gospel of Matthew, the assumption is that the disciples are always with Jesus.**<sup>2</sup> Right there by his side. For the rest of what we are going to read in this book, Matthew will only go out of his way to point out the times that *Jesus wasn't* with his disciples. So this was a nearly 24/7 type of thing. **Discipleship, by its very nature, involves spending a concentrated amount of time with those you are discipling.**

And then later, **at the very end of the gospel** of Matthew, in Jesus' parting instructions to some of these very same disciples, he will tell them that *they* are to “go and make disciples,” *themselves*.<sup>3</sup> Meaning that **Jesus' intention is that they—and therefore, we—would also spend a lot of our time making disciples.**

So **we've gotta talk for a bit** on this. Because you and I live in *America*, which is one of the most individualistic societies to ever exist. And I think because of that, **it is very easy for that individualism to creep in to how we perceive and understand our relationship with Jesus.** At least for a *lot* of people, faith has become this thing that is only personal, and mostly private, and is mainly just about the things that happen between me and God, and maybe the *occasional* other person, *if I decide I want* that sort of thing. This is how a large number of Christians in America think about their faith in Jesus.

And you **can choose to approach it that way.** But I need you to know that *that* looks *absolutely nothing like* what we find in the Scriptures when it comes to following Jesus. **In the Scriptures, following Jesus necessarily involves inviting others to follow you, as you follow Jesus.** It necessarily involves *discipleship*: spending concentrated, frequent amounts of time with other people, contributing to their spiritual well-being, and

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<sup>2</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 145

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 28:18-20.

letting them get an up-close, regular look into your life. And **you're doing all of those things in hopes that they will gain a functional understanding of what it looks like to follow Jesus themselves.** If you claim to follow Jesus, and something along *those lines* is not a part of your life, you are neglecting one of *the most important things* Jesus ever told us to do.

And just to be clear here: **when I say discipleship, I'm not just talking about community.** "Community" is a bit of a buzzword among some followers of Jesus, and for good reason: *community* is a great thing. Community is a *necessary environment* in which discipleship happens. But community is not the *same thing* as discipleship. You can be around *community often*, and still not be making *disciples*. **Community, if you're not careful, can become a very passive endeavor.** For some people, community is just physically transporting themselves to be around other followers of Jesus, and then they're pretty much done as far as effort goes. **Discipleship**, on the other hand, is *active* through and through. It's **regularly, proactively contributing to other people's lives, with the goal of helping them look more and more like Jesus.**

So just **two things I'd have you consider** here, practically speaking. First, **if you're not in a LifeGroup, try out a LifeGroup.** You may have heard us talk about LifeGroups once or twice around here. **LifeGroups are the primary context in our church for discipleship to happen.** They're not the *only* context for it—discipleship also happens within your family, with your spouse, with your kids, with your roommates, your friend groups—but LifeGroups are one *primary* context for discipleship within our church. And again, being in a LifeGroup isn't the same thing as discipleship, but it is a great first step *towards* it. Without being regularly *around* other followers of Jesus, discipleship is kind of a non-starter. So if you're not already in a group, that's a great *first step* towards discipleship.

Second, **if you are already in a LifeGroup** (or in a similar type of relationship with other followers of Jesus), I'd love to invite you to consider this question: **is my participation in that group active, or passive?** So, do I show up each week going "welp, I got myself here—and I'm *tired*, so I hope it's worth it." That's a *passive* approach. An *active* approach is showing up each week asking the question, "how do I contribute to the spiritual life and growth of the other people who are here? Who needs *encouragement*? Who needs *wisdom*? Who needs *help* that I can offer? How can I make it to where other people here are more like Jesus because of my efforts?" That's the *posture* of a disciple-maker. And that's what Jesus spent an awful lot of his time doing. That was part of how he brought "light into darkness" and how we do it too—through *discipleship*.

Now let's keep moving, because the next thing Jesus spends his time doing is **very related** to this idea of discipleship, and that's...

## Teaching & Preaching

The next thing we see in the passage is that Jesus spends a substantial amount of his time *teaching* and *preaching*. Take a look with me back at the first half of **v. 23**...

*[23] And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming (or, preaching) the gospel of the kingdom...*

Now **when most of us think of "teaching and preaching,"** we imagine something like what I'm doing up here right now. One person, presenting some type of monologue-like speech, to a crowd of people. And that's certainly true—I am indeed teaching and preaching right now. But you should know that **in the Scriptures, teaching and preaching is also a lot broader than just stuff like this.** Teaching and preaching in the bible has very little to do with being on a stage and very little to do with how many people are sitting and listening to you. It has much more to do with the *purpose* of what you're doing.

To help show you this, think about a **school teacher**. It is considered *teaching*, both when that person stands up in front of the class (or a computer camera as it is nowadays) and instructs, *and* when they sit individually with a student and has a dialogue with them about a math problem. In one case, there is a *room full of students*, and in the other case there is *one student—but in both cases it is considered "teaching."* Okay, it's very similar when it comes to teaching and preaching about the kingdom of God. **You can teach and preach to large rooms of people, and you can teach and preach to individual people. It can be a monologue, or it can be a dialogue, or a group conversation, or any number of other formats.** It's much less about the *format* of what's happening, and much more about the *content* of what is being taught and proclaimed.

And what's more is that **in the kingdom of God, teaching and preaching isn't limited to any one class or type of person. Any follower of Jesus with the Holy Spirit in them can do it.** *Pastors* can teach and preach, but so can church members. *Seminary* graduates can teach and preach, and those with no formal theological education at all. We see this clearly in the book of Acts, chapter 4. After Peter and John boldly preach and proclaim the good news of Jesus, it says the following about the people listening:

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and **perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.**<sup>4</sup>

So **Peter and John**, who had **no formal training** in preaching or teaching or theology (remember: *common end of the spectrum*), are themselves *preaching* and *teaching* about the kingdom of God. The only qualification they had is mentioned right there at the end: “...*they had been with Jesus.*” The only thing you need to be able to teach and preach is to spend time *with* Jesus (via the Holy Spirit for us living today). **If you have a relationship with Jesus, congratulations: you are now officially a teacher and preacher of the kingdom of God.** Consider yourself *knighthed*. **You now have all that you need to tell your neighbors, coworkers, classmates and friends about who Jesus is, what he has done for them, and what it looks like to follow him.**

Now, there is absolutely **always room for us to grow** in our *understanding* of the kingdom in order to know how to preach and teach about it *better*. In fact, I would *recommend* doing that. But my point is that teaching and preaching is a task given to *all* followers of Jesus—not just the ones in full-time ministry, or with a seminary degree, or ones with a stage to stand on. Does that make sense?

Now, maybe that **feels super overwhelming** to you. Maybe you’re thinking “I wouldn’t even know where to start *teaching* and *preaching* about Jesus, to even just *one* person.” And again, here—I would just point you to other followers of Jesus in your life. If you went up to your LifeGroup leader today and said “I really want to learn how to teach others about the good news of Jesus,” I can assure you they would *love* to have that *conversation with you*. But that is a big part of the ministry of the kingdom—teaching and preaching about the good news of Jesus.

Okay, so Jesus spends his time *discipling, teaching and preaching*, and **lastly...**

## Healing

Take a look with me, starting at the **tail end** of v. 23:

...and [Jesus was] **healing every disease and every affliction among the people.**  
[24] **So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick,**

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 4:13

*those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them.*

Now, just for you to know, the idea of healing runs **all through the book of Matthew**. So we will have *plenty* of opportunities to get into all the weeds of it in future weeks of this series. But for **today**, I just want you to see that **a central piece of the ministry of Jesus was healing the sick and the afflicted**. As in, he did this a *lot*. Jesus was *known* as the one who *healed*.

Now, a lot of **people assume that the reason** Jesus spent so much time healing and performing miracles was to “prove that he was God,” or something like that. And there’s an element of truth in there—to be sure, it was often *because* of these healings that a lot of people paid attention to Jesus and eventually believed that he was the Messiah. But **I don’t think that was the only reason for Jesus healing people**. Or even the *primary* reason. After all, just a little later he is going to send out his *disciples* to “heal every disease and every affliction.”<sup>5</sup> That’s the *exact same language* as what *Jesus* was doing here. And surely the reason *they* were given that task and ability wasn’t “to prove that *they* were God.”

So **what was the purpose** of Jesus healing the afflicted? This was the purpose: it was a **sign of the inbreaking kingdom** of God. It was a sign of *light* breaking into *darkness*. One day in the future, when the kingdom of God comes in its *fullness*, there *will be no* sickness. There will be no disease. There will be no disabilities or injuries. And when Jesus arrived on the scene, he began to give glimpses of that future world, in the here and now. That is why Jesus spent a lot of his time healing.

And in light of all that, **you and I as followers of Jesus are invited—commanded**, even—to be involved in God healing people as well. Now I *get* how that might make at least a few of us uncomfortable. Particularly those of us from church traditions that didn’t really emphasize that sort of thing or even trained us to be skeptical *of* it. **All my cards on the table, my church tradition was sort of like that**. So I want to acknowledge that this might be a new concept to some of us, at least in practice.

But at the same time, I want you to know that **there is simply no denying from Scripture that Jesus wanted his disciples to heal**. He desired for them to **be every bit as much involved in it as he was**. He even at one point says that his disciples will

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 10:1



do “greater works” than he did, when they are filled with the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup> *That’s a big statement* for him to make, and I’m just crazy enough to think he *meant* it, when he said it.

Now **maybe your take** is that he meant that to apply to his *immediate* disciples back *then*—not to *us* as his disciples *today*. And to that I say *maybe*. But **you have to work a lot harder** to read the bible *that way* than to read it *otherwise*. **You have to do something** with Paul saying to followers of Jesus in Corinth later, that they should “*earnestly desire*” the gifts from the Spirit—one of which is the gifts of healing.<sup>7</sup> **You have to do something** with James saying to the believers in his church, “*pray for one another, and confess your sins to one another, that you may be healed.*” You have to do *something* with the multitude of times in the New Testament where healing happens through disciples of Jesus *as a pattern* of ministry. You have to somehow explain all of that away. *Or, you could just believe that Jesus wants all of his disciples to be involved in healing.*

Now, that said, I know that for a *lot* of us, **our hang-up** with healing **isn’t our reading of the bible**. For *most* of us, our hang-up with it is much more straightforward: **we don’t see it happen, so we assume it doesn’t happen**. But if that’s you, I would just encourage you in this: **don’t use your personal experience as the litmus test of what is true**. Don’t assume that just because you haven’t *seen* healing happen, that it *doesn’t* happen. Don’t assume that just because you haven’t *experienced* healing yourself, that other people *haven’t*.

And for that matter, **apply that same principle to most anything** in the kingdom of God: **don’t assume, just because you haven’t experienced complete freedom from a particular sin, that that freedom can’t happen**. **Don’t assume, just because you haven’t seen a relationship restored, that that relationship can’t be restored**. **And don’t assume, just because you haven’t seen God do amazing, earth-shattering, mountain-moving things in your life yet, that he can’t do those types of things**. **In doing that, we limit God to our own imagination**. And God is far too wonderful for that. He’s far too *good* for that. God sent his son Jesus to set into motion a kingdom—to bring *light into darkness* in so many different ways—and he’s inviting us to join him in that effort. And **being a part of that kingdom is going to require that we learn to think, on some level, outside of our pre-existing categories and expectations**.

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<sup>6</sup> John 14:12

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:1, cf. 1 Corinthians 12:9

So some of **the main ways** that God brings light into darkness is through *discipling*, through *teaching and preaching*, and through *healing*. Now, **one last observation** on *all* of this and then we'll move into what we need to do with all this. But I find it so interesting, personally, that in today's world—and I'll say specifically in America—it **seems like Christians and churches feel like they have to pick only one of these three things**. Have you ever noticed that? Often, it feels like people *major* on one of them and *minor* on the others: some churches are *discipleship* churches, some churches are *preaching and teaching* churches, and some are *healing* churches. There's a tendency in churches—and also just in us as individuals—to take one of these and elevate it over and above the others.

So we **don't have any secrets here**—I think often, we at City Church tend oscillate between being primarily a *discipling* church and a *preaching and teaching* church. I think probably depending on your background and how long you've been around City Church, you might be inclined to think that we emphasize one of *those* over and above the rest. We've said before and I'll say again that we are desiring to become more *balanced* in the others.

But here's **what I want you to see** this morning—according to the gospel of Matthew, **we shouldn't feel like we have to pick and choose** between those three things. **We shouldn't feel like we have to focus on just one of these three incredible, vital ministries of the Church**. Being about the kingdom of God means that our communities and our churches should reflect *all* of them. Bringing light into darkness is about *discipleship*, it is about *teaching and preaching*, and it is about *healing* in Jesus. **Kingdom churches and kingdom people don't confine the light of God to any one particular method or strategy—they just want to see it arrive on the scene. And they'll do whatever it takes to be a part of it.**

So **as we wrap up**, I just want to give you **three questions** to think on that come out of all of this:

1. **Who are you discipling?** If part of how God brings light into darkness is through calling people to follow him, and by showing them how to follow him, who are you doing that for? Who, *right now*, has a close enough view into your life that they could *learn* from how you follow Jesus? Who could say, after a year or two or three in friendship with you, “I now know better how to follow Jesus and live in his kingdom, because I saw how *Alyssa* did it?” “...because I saw how *Kelechi* did it?” “...because I saw how *Max* did it?”

And if you're not sure, **what does it look like to kick start** one of those types of relationships? What needs to be adjusted, reprioritized, moved around in your life and schedule so that there is space for those sorts of relationships? That's the first question: *who are you discipling?* Second...

2. **Who are you teaching and preaching the kingdom of God to?** Chances are this answer is going to *overlap*, at least some, with the answer to question #1. But are there people that you are actively teaching about the ways of Jesus, in order that they might spiritually benefit from it? And are there people who you are regularly *proclaiming* the good news of Jesus to, in hopes that they might believe and accept it for the very first time?

And again, if no one comes to mind, what would it look like to **take steps** in that direction? Who has God put you in regular proximity to, that either needs help following Jesus, or needs to *hear about* Jesus for the first time? Maybe spend some time thinking on how practically you can move in that direction in regards to those people.

3. **Who are you praying for God to heal?** This one is a tougher one for a lot of us. Because there's always the risk that we could do it and be let down. But I just want to encourage you, that just because God hasn't *yet* doesn't mean that he *won't*. So who in your life, right now is experiencing sickness? Who is experiencing physical or mental or spiritual difficulty?

And once you've got that person or those people in mind, what would it look like to pray, and pray *persistently* for their healing? What would it look like to *pray*, not only for them **but with them?** And as you do, is there any built up cynicism that needs to be given over to Jesus in *your own* heart about God's ability to heal? Where do you need to ask that he would help you to believe that he's capable of it, even if you haven't seen it happen yet?

So I'd love for you to consider those three questions as we respond today, and even as we **move into our LifeGroup settings** this coming week. What does it look like for us to follow in Jesus' footsteps of bringing "light into darkness"? What does it look like for us to join in the ministry of the kingdom? What work needs to be done *in us*, and also *through us*?

And we'll just conclude here. I want to make sure we understand that **the reason we participate in all of this** is not because it makes God like us more, or because it makes us "good Christians" (whatever that means), or because we need to prove our worth, or anything else like that. **The reason we participate in all of this is because Jesus has brought *light* into the darkness of *our* lives. And because we know how that feels and the *difference* that makes, we want to, in turn, see that happen for as many other people as possible.** *That's* our motivation: that Jesus has brought light into darkness, and has included *us* in that mission through his cross and resurrection.

In the opening lines of the gospel of John, it says this:

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

Jesus the light, has come into the world. And **his light has not, will not**, and *can not* be overcome. That's one of the many things Jesus proved through his resurrection: that **no matter how dark it looks, no matter how bad it seems, no matter *what*—light *always eventually* wins.** So now, all that's left for me and you to do is join in that victory. To participate in the ministry of kingdom, together with Jesus, and bring *light* into *darkness*.

So with that said, let's pray and ask for his help.