

December 14, 2025

INVITATION: MATT 4:12-25

Introductory Activity Option 1 (Adapted from ETB LG, 31)

“Ask: *What are some jobs today where you might find apprentices? What would be some advantages to becoming an apprentice in one of those jobs?* (PSG, p. 20)

Introduce: Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 20 of the PSG [See Notes Box]. Lead a brief discussion about the goal of an apprentice. Emphasize that apprentices gain the skills needed to perform at the same level as the master.

Say: *Believers are called to apprentice themselves to Jesus. A more common way of saying this is that we become His disciples. It’s not a commitment to take lightly because it’s a commitment that lasts a lifetime.”*

Summarize Transition: Last week, we examined the glorious and grueling beginning of Jesus’ ministry. The writer, Matthew, is going to jump ahead a little in the story of Jesus’ ministry. In his Gospel, Luke tells us that Jesus traveled to Nazareth after His temptation, but He, nor His message, was received in His hometown. Matthew reveals that Jesus established His base of operations in Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. As we continue to look at the beginnings of Jesus’ ministry, our lesson today will reveal: The Context of Jesus’ Ministry, The Commitment of Jesus’ Ministry Partners, and The Comprehensive Nature of Jesus’ Ministry.

1. STARTING OUT (MATT. 4:12-17)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew 4:12-17.

Explain: Herod, the Roman-appointed ruler of the regions (we will learn more about him next week), had arrested John the Baptist because John had “publicly denounced his illegal marriage to his brother’s wife (Mark 6:14-29).” (ETB LG, 32) Blomberg asserts, “After John’s imprisonment, Jesus has no more reason to stay in Judea and so returns home to Galilee.” (NAC, 88) We should note that Jesus was not fleeing Herod; instead, as we will see, Jesus strategically began His ministry in Galilee. This passage reveals **the Geographic Context of Jesus’s early ministry.**

Matthew tells us that He “withdrew” to Galilee. This is the northern region of Israel. At that time, Galilee had a population of 2-3 million people residing in the countryside and 200 cities, towns, and villages. The town in which Jesus settled, Capernaum, was located on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee. “As an economic center in Galilee, it was more significant than tradition has often allowed. The designation ‘city’ distinguishes it from the ‘fishing village’ category.”¹ Moreover, it was a more significant location than Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth. Galilee was also distinct in Israel because of the high percentage of Gentiles, non-Jews, living there. The Explore the Bible Commentary explains that “more than half the residents of Galilee were Gentiles.”

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Matthew* (Preaching)
- *New American Commentary: Matthew* (NAC)
- *Exalting Christ in Matthew* (Exalting)
- *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 1-13* (ACCS)
- *The King Has Come* (Spurgeon)

“An apprenticeship is a process for training others in a trade or a profession. Usually, it involves on-the-job training. The goal is that sometime down the road the apprentice can do the job with the same skill level the master teacher has. Christians are called to apprentice themselves to Jesus. It’s called being a disciple. Each of us is called to apprentice ourselves to Jesus.” (ETB PSG, 20; ETB LG, 29)

¹ George W. Knight, “Capernaum,” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 263. J Cardinell, 2025

(ETBC, 24). Matthew actually calls the region “Galilee of the Gentiles.” This population of Gentiles is a product of Jewish history. After the reign of King Solomon, the nation of Israel split into two parts. The Northern Kingdom quickly fell into idolatry and, over time, became the victim of an Assyrian invasion. This invasion was the judgment of the Lord for the nation’s infidelity to Him. The Assyrians deported many of the ethnically Jewish inhabitants and replaced them with people from outside the area. Since that time, the region was home to a large Gentile population.

Application: Jesus chose to center the early days of His ministry in the geographic context of Galilee, a place distant from the religious center in Jerusalem and historically populated by a large number of Gentiles. The city of Capernaum would be His base of operation. Spurgeon writes, “Where he found himself living, there he put forth his power. Our sphere is where we are.” (Spurgeon, 44)

Discuss: What unique characteristics of your location and your unique qualities might impact the way you do ministry in your location?

Explain: The Lord chose to return to His home region to do ministry. As we will see, the population and the culture of the area impacted His ministry. We do not always get to choose where we live. Nevertheless, we can choose to do ministry wherever we find ourselves living. We do not have to move to a foreign country and learn their culture or language because we know the culture of our hometown. We do not have to develop contacts among the locals and gain their support because we are the locals. We should strive to do ministry where we are and seek to win the lost for Christ wherever we live. Jesus’ early ministry was set in a geographic context, but there is another context we should consider.

Reread Matthew 4:14-16

Explain: Here we see the **Prophetic Context of Jesus’ ministry**. In the 8th century BC, the prophet Isaiah had prophesied about the events recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Speaking of the Jews and Gentiles living in the Galilee, an area closely equivalent to the territory of the two ancient tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, Isaiah says they “live in darkness” and live “in the land of the shadow of death.” This is “a very graphic description of men bowed under the power of sin, and paralyzed by fear of condemnation.” (Spurgeon, 43) However, more than 700 years before, the prophet knew that a savior was coming, and He would come to these people first. Isaiah and Matthew say they have “seen a great light” and “a light has dawned” among them. The geographic ministry of Jesus represents a fulfillment of prophecy. This prophetic context also points us to the ultimate mission of Jesus. While Jesus came “first to the Jew” (Romans 1:16), He also came for the Gentiles. Isaiah points us to this in other prophecies. Isaiah 42:6 says the Messiah will be “a light to the nations.” In chapter 49 verse 6, the prophecy expounds more fully. It says, “I will also make you a light for the nations, to be my salvation to the ends of the earth.” Just as we saw last week with Jesus’ baptism, the beginning of Jesus’ ministry points to the end. The baptism pointed to Christ’s death. Here we see that the geographic context of His early ministry, coupled with the prophetic context, points to the end, or purpose, of His mission to redeem the nations. This passage also reveals the **Eschatological Context of Christ’s ministry**. Eschatology is the study of last things.

Reread Matthew 4:17

Notes:

Here we see that Jesus picked up John's message, and this message is an eschatological message. The Kingdom of God has come near. With the coming of Christ, we have the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God. With Christ, it is already present but has not yet reached its culmination as it will at His second coming. Jesus reveals that the coming of the Kingdom demands something of the people. The coming of the holy Kingdom requires repentance by the people. As we saw last week, before Jesus' death, repentance demonstrated a person's desire to live in line with God's law. After Christ's death, repentance coupled with a recognition of Christ's work on the cross and His resurrection associates a person with the King and enables the King to save them from the "land of the shadow of death."

Summarize Transition: While what might simply appear to be a passing statement by the author of the Gospel, this passage regarding geography, prophecy, and proclamation reveals much. Jesus has come for the nations, Jesus is the answer to prophecy, and Jesus' ministry inaugurates the long-awaited Kingdom of God. To accomplish the world mission of salvation begun with Christ's life, death, and resurrection, Jesus is going to recruit some men to carry on the mission after His death. Let's look at the next passage.

2. CALLING OUT (MATT. 4:18-22)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew 4:18-22.

Explain: The first thing we can note about this passage is **Who Jesus is Calling**. Here, He calls 2 sets of brothers. This is not the first time He has met these men. While John the Baptist was still ministering in Judea, he spoke to two of his disciples about the Lord. After meeting Jesus, one of these two, Andrew, went to his brother Peter and said, "We have found the Messiah." (John 1:41) On another day Peter was working in his boat and Jesus asked him to let Him use it as a floating stage from which to teach the people on the shore (Luke 5:3) Peter and Andrew were closely connected with the other brothers James and John (Luke 5:9) All of them had heard Jesus teach, and had probably all come to the same conclusion as Andrew: that Jesus was the Messiah. So, when Jesus comes to them and says, "Follow me," he might as well be saying, "I know who you think I am, and you are right. So, now become my disciples."

We might ask ourselves why Jesus called these four men out of the many fishermen on the lake that day. Well, it certainly wasn't because of their qualifications. The Gospel writers all paint a picture of these men and those who would join them as flawed, unqualified men. One scholar writes, "Jesus did not call these guys because of what they brought to the table...They were Galileans, deemed to be lower class, rural, and uneducated by many. They were hardly the cultural elite, and they certainly weren't the most spiritually qualified for this task. Instead, they were narrow-minded and superstitious, full of Jewish prejudices, misconceptions, and animosities." (Exalting, 83)

Application: The same is true today. The Lord does not call us to salvation because of our qualifications. We are each flawed and broken by sin. We are enemies of God prior to salvation. Moreover, He doesn't *need* our abilities, our money, or our connections. He might allow us to use those for His Kingdom later, but He does not save us because He needs our help. Christ, in His grace and mercy, saves us when we do not deserve it and bring nothing to the table. As we are going to see, these unqualified, undeserving men respond immediately

"Jesus announces that the *eschatological reality* of the future reign of God's King is now here and that the *ethical imperative* that naturally follows that reality is repentance." (Preaching, 95)

"Immediate repentance is demanded because the theocracy is established: the kingdom demands turning from sin." (Spurgeon, 43)

"That word 'repent' means to admit your sin (confession), to express sorrow over sin (contrition), and to turn from your sin (conversion)." (Exalting, 81)

and follow Jesus. They don't stop to think about it, but we should stop and consider what it meant when Jesus called them to follow Him.

We should ask **What is Jesus calling them from?** First, **He is calling them from their normal lives.** He is calling them to a mission. O'Donnell says that one reason they followed Jesus was the "value of the mission." The future lives of these men show that the life of a fisherman, even a successful one, could in no way compare to the life on mission to which Jesus was calling them. His call might be rewritten as, "Don't fish for salmon when you can fish for souls; don't catch minnows when you can capture men." (Preaching, 96)

Application: The same is true for us today. Our lives, no matter how successful, how full of adventure, or how secure, can in no way compare to a life lived on mission for Christ because that life is a life dedicated to the greatest mission of all. "Christ's call is more than our own salvation; it is a call for the salvation of others." (Preaching, 96) However, note the caveat above. A life on mission will be a life **dedicated** to the greatest mission of all. That brings us to the second thing Christ is calling these men from.

Second, He is calling them from normal allegiances. All four men left their boats that day. It is not clear if they intended to leave their jobs for good. Some scholars argue that they maintained their jobs as fishermen.² However, while they might not have known it at the time, the next three years of their lives would be dominated by their efforts to "follow" Christ. And after Christ rose from the dead, any allegiance to the fishing trade took a back burner to their Spirit-led efforts to enlarge God's Kingdom. Not only did they leave their boats that day, but they left their families. James and John left their father Zebedee sitting in the boat, mending nets. It is clear, they did not ostracize, ghost, or endanger their families' health. Peter's mother-in-law actually plays a role in Christ's ministry (Luke 4:38-39). But it is clear that they understood that following Christ was important.

Application: We, too, should understand that when Christ calls us to discipleship, our normal allegiances must be reordered. The disciples serve as a mirror for us to evaluate our own dedication to Christ. "Who or what is first in your life—the fish, the nets, the boat, the career, the income, the brother, the father, the family? Are you willing to break from any or all 'former loyalties'—occupation, friends, family, religion, etc.—in order to wholeheartedly serve one Master? Moreover, are you willing to do what this Master says? To go where he wants you to? To give away what must now be given away?" (Preaching, 95) If we have rearranged our allegiances, we will be able to respond immediately when Jesus calls us to a mission or ministry.

Mathew tells us they responded immediately—they immediately followed. They dropped what they were doing to follow Jesus. Part of the discipleship process for a modern believer is to follow the Lord when He calls. We should not hesitate. A phrase commonly attributed to Thomas a' Kempis is "Delayed obedience is disobedience." While the saying might be apocryphal, there is a truth to it. When Christ commands us to

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² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Peter, The Apostle," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1660. J. Cardinell, 2025

serve, give, go, pray, speak, or share, we should respond immediately. We should immediately follow the Lord when He calls us to do something connected with the great mission.

Summarize and Transition: This passage reveals that Jesus does not call the qualified. It also reveals that those who answer the call are embarking on an extraordinary life and a life that will reorient their allegiances. But we must ask, **What is Jesus calling them to?** We will see that in the next passage. It will reveal that “They would be doing what Jesus was doing, calling people to follow Jesus.” (ETBC, 27)

3. REACHING OUT (MATT. 4:23-25)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew 4:23-25.

Explain: This passage not only reveals the content of Jesus’ ministry it also shows us what Jesus is calling His disciples to. A disciple is “one who learns.” (ETBC, 22) Jesus’ disciples will learn a lot from Jesus’ words, but they will also learn a lot from watching Him go about His ministry.

Ask: What are the three aspects of Jesus’ ministry as outlined in this passage?

Explain: Matthew shows that Jesus’ ministry consisted of three broad activities: teaching, preaching, and healing.

First, we see **the Ministry of the Word**. Matthew explains that Jesus went “all over Galilee.” This implies an extended period of time (see ETBC, 28). While traveling all over Galilee, Jesus would teach in synagogues. “A place where worship services were held, and teaching was done... Outside of the Temple in Jerusalem, most of Jewish religious life was focused on the synagogues.” (ETBC, 28-29) Teaching was central to the life of the synagogues. These institutions were developed while the nation of Israel was in exile in Babylon, where they had no access to the Temple. Rabbis would teach the people God’s Word in the synagogues. “*Teaching* involved making comments about Old Testament Scripture and pictures a teacher and learner.” (ETBC 29) Jesus would expound on the OT, and who better to tell the people what the Word meant than the one who wrote the Word in the first place. Matthew also tells us that Jesus went about preaching. In this case, preaching and teaching are different. While they both are meant to help the hearer walk more completely with the Lord, preaching is an exercise of announcement. “*Preaching* involved speaking or announcing something new as a town herald [might].” (ETBC, 29) Jesus expounded on Scripture, and He heralded the arrival of the Kingdom. As we saw above, the arrival of the Kingdom necessitated repentance among the people. We can apply this in two ways: What did the Initial Disciples Takeaway from Jesus’ actions, and What can the Modern Disciple Takeaway from Jesus’ ministry?

The Initial Disciples’ Takeaway: If we consider the first disciples and their eventual ministry. We can see both practices. They were heralds of the Good News. Picture Peter at Pentecost and preaching to thousands, or Paul standing in a city square in Asia Minor. In both cases, they were heralding the gospel truth that the Kingdom had come. Consider these two men again, as well as the other disciples. In their ministry after the ascension of Christ, they participated in a teaching ministry. They sat with others in small groups and explained the Scripture (Peter in Acts 10; or Paul in Acts 17:10-12), not to mention their letter-writing ministry. Let’s now look at the modern disciple’s take away.

The Modern Disciple’s Takeaway:

“Here in the mirror are Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Does your faith in any way reflect theirs?”
(Preaching, 95)

Discuss: How can you participate in the ministry of teaching and preaching?

There are two essential takeaways for the modern disciple. First, just like Jesus' first disciples, modern disciples should herald the gospel message through evangelistic efforts. Second, modern disciples should make a point of teaching others the Scripture. A person might participate in a small group ministry and listen to sermons for years, but never teach the truth they learn to anyone else. Every disciple is called to be a disciple who makes disciples. We are not called to be scholars or great speakers, but we are called to at least sit with someone and talk about Scripture. The second takeaway relates to the way we learn. Sometimes in life, we practice passive listening when others are speaking, and they ask, "Did you hear what I said?" We can do something similar when listening to a sermon or a lesson. We practice passive learning. We should strive to be active participants while listening to a sermon or a lesson. In his article "How to Hear a Sermon Well," Scott Hubbard gives us some tips on active listening to a sermon.³

1. **Till the Soil:** Break up the dirt. "Furrow the ground. Make way for the word." Prepare your heart to be "eager, prepared, and expecting to bring something good home." Prepare yourself. "First, remove stones by clearing away unnecessary hindrances — especially tiredness and lateness. How many of us struggle to listen on Sunday morning because we stayed up too late on Saturday night? Or because we shuffled into the gathering partway through the second song, our heads still swirling with the events of the morning?... So, before the gathering, resolve to live in a manner that welcomes the word of God."
2. **Bury the Seed:** "During the gathering, then, we labor to bury the seed of the word deep into our hearts. Which means, at bottom, that we strive to pay attention (Hebrews 2:1)." Distractions are abundant both in the room and in our minds. Therefore, we should prepare our hearts to hear. Hubbard writes, "I have found help by applying a well-known passage about *preachers* to *hearers*. The apostle Peter writes, "Whoever speaks, [let him so do] as one who speaks oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11). And therefore, "Whoever hears, let him do so as one who hears oracles of God." There are some practical ways to listen well. "We might turn off our phones entirely, rather than allow them to vibrate. We might follow along with the sermon in a paper Bible. Some might take brief notes of the sermon's most striking points. The most practical step of all, however, is to embrace the habit of active listening."
3. **Water the Ground:** "What we do with the preached word depends on whether we see ourselves not as consumers of the word, nor even as mere hearers of the word, but as stewards of the word." If I have 10 dollars, I am to steward it well. When I give it away, it is the new owner's responsibility to steward it. It's the same with the preached Word. The goal of a good preacher is not information transfer but life transformation. As stewards of the Word, we should treat a sermon as a tool for life transformation. This means meditating and discussing the message with others. Instead of gossip and criticism of this or that at the Sunday lunch table, discuss the sermon. You can ask questions like, "How did that sermon land on you?" "What word did you need to hear the most?" "How do you think we should respond?"

The Ministry of Deeds: Jesus coupled the Ministry of the Word with the Ministry of Deeds. Matthew tells us that He healed all manner of afflictions, both physical and spiritual. His healing ministry was a verification of His teaching and preaching ministry. In effect, the miracles proclaimed, "I am telling you that the Kingdom has come. Now let me show you that the Kingdom has come." Both His ministry of the Word and His ministry of deeds attracted crowds of both Jew and Gentile. In the geographic description in verse 25, "we have the

³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-to-hear-a-sermon-well>

whole land of Israel covered. We have Galilee in the northwest, the Decapolis in the northeast, Jerusalem and Judea in the southwest, and finally ‘beyond the Jordan,’ in the southeast....” (Preaching, 92)

The Initial Disciples’ Takeaway: In their ministry following the ascension of Christ, the early disciples were privy to many mighty works of God that caused others to marvel at Him and verified their ministry in His name. They also took away a desire for the lost, regardless of their station or ethnic background. Jesus’ ministry demonstrated that the gospel was for all people and could change the lives of those who accepted it.

The Modern Disciple’s Takeaway: While we might not participate in a healing ministry as Jesus did when He healed physical ailments, we can participate in a ministry that affects people’s physical situation. Meeting people’s physical needs regardless of their station or ethnic background shows that the Kingdom has come in our hearts. It also gives us an opportunity to share the gospel and help people enter the Kingdom. We also should never forget that Christ came for all people. If they flocked to Him because of His words and deeds, we should speak words and practice deeds that cause them to flock to us so that we can share the life-changing gospel message with them.

Summarize and Transition: Jesus called these 4 men and others after them to be His disciples. He called them to be learners. We also call the original 12 disciples “Apostles.” While disciple means one who learns, apostle means “one who is sent.” (ETBC, 22) These men spent just a few years diligently following Christ and learning from his words and deeds. They then became His sent ones to do as He: teach, preach, and heal the soul.

CONCLUDE

Just as young people need to apprentice under a well-seasoned mentor, the disciples needed to apprentice under Christ. We too need to apprentice under Christ. We do so by first following Him, then applying His word to our lives, and then replicating His ministry through the power of the Holy Spirit. In so doing, we become his disciples and then his (lower case “a”) apostles—His learners and His sent ones.

Challenge: There are three challenges we might take away from this lesson:

1. Are you a follower of Christ? Have you repented of sin and made Him Lord? If you have, are you diligently following Him?
2. Are you consistently seeking to understand the Word, helping others understand the Word, and living out the Word?