

Matthew 4:17

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[0 : 00] If you would come back with me to the passage we read in the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 4. And as we're led by our Lord this evening, I'd like to concentrate on the passage that we have from verse 12 to verse 17.

Where we can maybe use the final words of verse 17 as our text for this evening. Where it says, From that time on, Jesus began to preach, repent for the kingdom of heaven.

Is near. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. We find in these words, the first words that Jesus spoke as a preacher of the Gospel.

These words signified the beginning of the message that Jesus came to preach. It signified the beginning of this part of his life.

They weren't the first words, or the first events that we have recorded of our Lord in Scripture. We have two events spoken of, at which we have, at which give to us valuable background information about the mission that the Lord Jesus had to this sin-sick world.

[1 : 22] These two events that occurred prior to Jesus beginning to preach were, of course, his baptism and the temptation that he endured. In Matthew chapter 3, and in the other Gospel accounts, we have the account given to us of how Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist.

You will know the account, no doubt, very well yourselves. You will recall how two miraculous events occurred at that baptism. After John the Baptist, after he agreed to baptize Jesus, but he was originally very hesitant to do so, because he knew and recognized Jesus to be the anointed one of God.

After he baptized Jesus, and Jesus came up out of the river Jordan, then the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove. And in the voice from heaven thundered out, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Jesus, at that baptism, was experiencing the presence of God the Father, and the presence of God the Holy Spirit. This appearance by these two persons of God the Holy Spirit, this coming into this particular scene of time, was a sign to Jesus, and to the people around about him, that God was indeed with this man.

At the beginning of his ministry, our Lord was experiencing something of the presence of his Father, and the presence of God the Holy Spirit, that he would have known prior to coming into the world in the first place.

[3 : 03] After Jesus' baptism, there was one other event that he had to go through. That was his temptation. And in his temptation, you have the greatest contrast that we possibly could have as to what went beforehand.

We're told that after his baptism, he was then led out by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted by the devil for 40 days and for 40 nights.

What a contrast. To be experiencing the presence and power of God, to go to the position of utter isolation in the wilderness, when the devil for 40 days and 40 nights was trying everything in his power to try and get Jesus to sin.

If Jesus was ever classed as being an enemy territory, then surely that period of 40 days and 40 nights would come into that category. It's after that period of 40 days and 40 nights that we have an insight into what exactly went on in that time.

And we have the three examples of the temptations that the devil put to Jesus that we read together at the beginning of chapter 4. But these three temptations, like all the other temptations Jesus had to endure, he withstood them.

[4 : 17] And he beat the devil, and the devil did not get Jesus to sin. The Lord brought an end to the temptation by telling the devil to depart, and the devil had to leave.

When the devil left, angels came and ministered to our Lord. The time for our Lord to start preaching the message that he came to the earth with was now fast approaching.

The time for the gospel message to start being proclaimed was now fast approaching. But there was one other thing that had to happen. That other thing was that the forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist, his message had to be stopped.

John came and preached a message of repentance to the people of Israel. To turn from their evil ways. To turn to God.

To be baptized. To show that they had recognized that they needed to repent. And to get in a right relationship with their God. John was the one prophesied in the Old Testament.

[5 : 25] The one who was sent to prepare the way of the Messiah. The one who was sent to come before the Chosen One of God. The one who was going to be the Saviour of the world.

The role of the forerunner was obviously to prepare the way. It was to forerun the one who was to come. Jesus was the one who was to come.

So for Jesus to come and take over the public ministry of God. The forerunner's message had to come to an end. And we know how that happened.

That as John, fearless as he was in speaking against the religious people of the time. Speaking against kings. He brought the message of God to the people. It didn't matter who they were.

Because of that, Herod Antipas arrested him. Because John spoke up against his lifestyle. John was obviously then put in prison. When he was later to be murdered.

[6 : 25] But the public work of the forerunner had at that point come to a conclusion. So the public work of the one being forerun now had to start.

The time was now right. The way had now been prepared. The gospel message could now begin in earnest.

Now as we look at what this passage says to us this evening. I'd like us to look very simply at the mission that Jesus had. The message he had for that mission.

And to, in conclusion, come to some application from that mission and from that message. To each one of us in here this evening.

Firstly then, the mission of Jesus. The gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us that once John the Baptist had been put in prison.

[7 : 22] And Jesus was aware of this. That he left where he was and headed to the region of Galilee. Now this region of Galilee was in the north part of Israel.

Luke's gospel specifically tells us that Jesus was led to that part of Israel by the power of the Spirit. He was led there for a particular reason.

And the reason was that he was going to fulfill another one of the requirements that the Old Testament had set for the Messiah to fulfill. Now the areas that Jesus went to in Galilee.

They would have been known in times gone past. It's not sure as to at that particular time whether they were still known as these areas. But they were known as Debulun and known as Naphtali. And that is the areas that Jesus went to begin his public ministry.

Now we quoted, as we read together in the Prophecy of Isaiah in chapter 9. The passage that speaks about that particular requirement of the Messiah.

[8 : 27] But I'd like to notice two or three points about these areas called Zebulun and Naphtali. Well notice first the location of them.

Now Zebulun and Naphtali were two of Jacob's sons. Therefore they were the names given to two of the tribes of Israel. Now when the tribes of Israel came out from captivity in Egypt.

And as they crossed into the promised land. As God told them the land that was now given to them. The promised land was then divided up among the various tribes. Each tribe was given a particular proportion of land located in the land of Canaan.

Now the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. They were given lands to the north of Israel. Now the implication of being given lands to the north of Israel. Meant that these particular tribes were more susceptible to invasion.

From enemies from the north. Than some of the other tribes who would have been in the central parts of Israel. We have recorded in some of the Assyrian records. Of how the armies frequently came into these areas.

[9 : 35] That would have been known as Zebulun and Naphtali. And reclaimed them for themselves. So the threat of invasion was more real to these people. Than it would have been to

people who were in the other tribes.

We'll notice something of the condition of the people. At that time that the prophecy was written in Isaiah. There were prophets of the Lord who would give direction to the people.

As to how God was wanting them to live in his sight. The prophets would have spoken to the people. Who would have lived in these areas of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Would have spoken to these tribes. Now it may be because of the fact that they were under the threat of invasion. More than other parts of Israel. That they hearkened to the word of the prophets. More than some of the other tribes would have had. In one respect it's human nature to do so.

Think of the people of Israel. When they were coming out of captivity. When they were reclaiming the land of Canaan for themselves.

[10:42] When things were going well. When invasions were going correctly. When there was no apparent threat to them.

They were far less likely to call upon God's help. Than they would be if they were in great danger themselves. So by inference. If the people of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Had this threat over their heads. Then the logical conclusion is. That they would be more ready and willing. To listen to the voice of their God. Now the people groups have a description here.

That they are classified as being in darkness. People living in darkness. And they are living in the land of the shadow of death. In Isaiah's time.

When these people were in this darkness. And under this shadow of death. When the words of God through the prophets would come. These words would come as comfort. And these words would come as assurance.

[11:42] And to them a light would dawn in their circumstances. Because they would hear of the words of God. And God's message to these people. And that would result.

That these people wouldn't be as downcast. As they would have been otherwise. So that's the location. The condition of the people. Notice again.

Where it is written. Where this prophecy is actually written. It's written in Isaiah chapter 9. In a chapter that speaks specifically. Regarding the Messiah.

It's a chapter that a lot of us will know very well. We often hear it quoted at Christmas time. The various names of the Messiah. What is called Wonderful Council.

The Mighty God. Everlasting Father. Prince of Peace. The passage speaks of the government that Jesus will have. It speaks of his people.

[12:36] And how it speaks of how the kingdom of God will be established. Through this Messiah. It's a passage that speaks. And prophesies about the Messiah.

Who is Jesus. So it's to this region. That Jesus went. With his gospel message. First of all. Like the people in Isaiah's day.

Who were sitting in darkness. And under the shadow of death. In one sense. The people of Jesus' day. Were in exactly the same position. Their situation.

Hadn't changed. But rather. Instead of being in that position of darkness. And under the shadow of death. Because of the threat of invasion. The crux of the problem.

That left them in that condition. Was the problem. Of sin. It wasn't invasion. But it was the problem of sin. And the result of sin. Which is darkness.

[13:35] And which is death itself. So there you have the mission. Of Jesus. Summed up. To a people. Who are in a condition of darkness.

To a people. Who are under the shadow of death. The message of Jesus. Comes to these people. With hope. To a people.

Who are unable. To help themselves. Of their own situation. To a people. Who are in need. Who are in need of light. To remove the darkness. And shadows that are around about them. That is what.

Jesus went to the people with. To the hope. And to give them hope. That would in effect. Remove the darkness. Remove the shadows. That were in the condition.

Of the people. Of that time. The people needed the gospel message. They needed the hope. Of the gospel message. And it was. That particular mission.

[14:30] That Jesus took. To these. Particular people. And to the people. Of every generation. Ever since. So the mission of Jesus. What message.

Did Jesus. Employ. For his mission. Well we have the message. Given to us. In verse 17. And the message. Would have been.

An easily understood message. In one respect. For the people. Of Zebulun. And Naphtali. They were told. That there is. Hope. The message of hope.

Was given. To these people. That there was a qualifying factor. That message of hope. Was dependent. Upon the people. Repenting. The people.

Had to repent. Because. The kingdom of heaven. Was near. To them. And what they were asked. To do. Was by no means. An easy thing.

[15:28] For them to do. What Jesus was saying. To them. Was that he wanted them. To change their ways. He wanted them. To realize. Their situation. Realize the peril. Of the situation. That they were actually in.

And to turn from it. The repentance. That was required. Was to confess. Their guilt. Before the kingdom of heaven. About the wrong. That they had done. But not only. To confess it.

To turn away. From that. Guilt. And turn away. From these things. And to truly live lives. That were different. That is the message. That Jesus.

Went to them. That the people. When they received this message. They had to realize something. About this message. That they had to recognize. That this message.

Was given to them. Specifically. In the light. Of his presence. They were actually in. That Jesus. That Jesus himself. Was. The kingdom of heaven. That is spoken of. Here.

[16:23] That in the eyes. Of the kingdom of heaven. These people. Like their forefathers. Were. Under this. Shadow of death. They were in. This darkness. And if they stayed.

In that position. Then it wouldn't just be. The shadow of death. That they would be under. But it would be death. Itself. These people. Were sinners. In the eyes of God.

And because they were sinners. In the eyes of God. If they didn't realize. That condition. That they were in. And the peril of it. Then they would be.

In no fit state. To go. And to meet. Their maker. And at that point. The only judgment. That could be given. To them. Would have been a message. And a judgment.

Of death. But the glorious message. Of the gospel. To these people. And to ourselves. Today. Is that they needn't despair. Because there's a message. Of hope. Because there is a message.

[17:19] Of hope. That can. Leave sinners. Like you and I. Avoiding. That just. Judgment. Of death. By repenting. And by turning. To God.

The repentance. That they. Were required. To do. Would result. In light. Coming into. Their situation. The light.

That the gospel message. Alone. Can bring. What's the only thing. That can remove darkness. In the world. Round about us. The only thing. That can remove darkness. Is light. What removes the darkness.

Of night time. When the sun. Comes up. And the darkness. Is gone. In a spiritual sense. It's exactly the same. What can remove the darkness. Of your soul.

And of my soul. Well. Nothing other. Than spiritual light. Who has that. Spiritual light. We'll go back. To scripture. John chapter 8.

[18:17] Tells us. Of the words. That Jesus. Said. Jesus said. I am the light. Of the world. Those who follow me. Will not walk.

In darkness. But they will have. The light. Of life. Jesus. Is the one. The only one. Who holds. The light. Of the gospel.

Because Jesus. Is. The very. Light. Of the gospel. And here. At the beginning. Of his ministry. He is giving hope. To the people.

By telling them. To repent. If they repent. Then light. Will dawn. In their situation. And then. They will know. What it is. To have.

This shadow. Over them. Removed. They will know. What it is. To have the threat. Of eternal death. Over them. To be removed. They will know. What it is. To have the darkness. Round about them. To be removed.

[19:11] But all. Through. The light. Of the gospel. That the Lord. Alone. Can give to them. The mission. Of Jesus. And the message.

For that mission. Well. What do we notice. About that mission. And about. That message. Looking at things.

From the Christian perspective. There is one or two things. That we can. Bring out from this. That we can. Hopefully by God's help. Apply to our own situations. The first thing. That we can take out. From a passage like this. Is. A spirit. Of thankfulness. That we should have. That Jesus. Actually. Came. To start preaching. The gospel message.

When we read. These words. Of Jesus. And when we read. What the. Surrounding context. Of these words. Say to us. How often.

[20 : 09] Do we stop. And ask. What message. Is being spoken to us. There. How often. Do we try. And find. The real significance. Of the messages. That the gospel.

Gives. To us. We know these passages. So well. It's so often. When we read them. It's in. One year. Out the other. But you can't read. The real.

Obviously. But it's as if. We go through. These things. And just don't think. We know. These of them. Because we know. Them so well. But we have to be.

Thankful. For passages. Like this. We have to be. Thankful. That Jesus. Actually. Started.

Preaching. The gospel message. Because when he. Started preaching.

The gospel message. Then the whole plan. Of salvation. Moved on. To another level. This was another. Part. Of the calling. And of the life. And of the fulfillment.

[21 : 02] Of all that Jesus had to do. To become the Messiah. This was. A major part. Of the work of Jesus. To come with his message. And this.

Next step. In the plan of salvation. That huge step. That it was. Was another step. Towards the greatest. Step. That was required. In salvation. Where Jesus. Would be nailed.

To that cross. At Calvary. To accomplish. Salvation. Once and for all. We have to be thankful. That Jesus. Started preaching. That message.

Who did he preach. The message to? He preached it. To normal people. He didn't confine. His message. To the. Important. Religious. Rulers. Of the time. No.

He went to the common person. And the common person. Heard. The gospel message. They heard it. And they understood it. Jesus went to them. With this message.

[21 : 57] With this offer. Of hope. We have to be thankful. That. As Jesus. Came on to this. Next step. In the plan of salvation.

Of preaching. In view of going to that. Great and final step. Of accomplishing salvation. Through death. And resurrection. We have to be thankful. That the preaching.

Of Jesus. Continued. Through. The power of his spirit. Using his people. After Jesus ascended. That that same preaching. Of that same message.

Continued. Through. From Jerusalem. To the surrounding areas. That it continued. From these surrounding areas. Into Europe. Into Africa. Into Asia. Into Britain.

Into Scotland. Into wherever. We heard the gospel message ourselves. Because that same message. That we hear. From the word of God. This evening. That same message. That we heard.

[22 : 50] When. The blindness. And the darkness. It was removed. From our own. Understanding. It's the same message. That Jesus preached. All these years ago. Isn't the gospel message.

Such. A. Fantastic. Account. Of the love. That Jesus has. For souls. Isn't it. Just. An incredible.

Description. And way. Of how. All these things. Had worked together. Through the same. Message. That Jesus preached. Through God. And his providence. Giving us.

His word. That we can hear. That same message. And that same power. And that we can be saved. What can that. But do.

That leave us. With a spirit of thankfulness. That their savior started. To preach. The gospel message. Another teaching. That we can find. From this passage.

[23 : 44] Is that. The message. That Jesus. Preached. Is. A message. That was. Relevant. To the spiritual.

Situation. Of the people. In Zebulun. And Naphtali. But it's also. A message. That's relevant. To the spiritual. Situation. Of all races.

Of people. Ever since. Even up. To our own day. And generation. Today. The same needs. As there were. Among people. In Jesus's time.

Of people. Being surrounded. In this darkness. And under this shadow. The prospect of death. Is the same. Need. And same condition. That the people. Are in. Today.

The same prospect. Awaits the people. Today. As awaited. The people. In Zebulun. And Naphtali. If they didn't heed. To this message. This message.

[24 : 40] Of hope. The same requirements. For salvation. From that day. To today. There's one major difference. To the message.

That Jesus had. To this same message. And how it's applicable today. The major difference is. We're some 2,000 years. Closer now. To the end of time. Than it was. Back when Jesus. Preached that message. First of all. So that means. The whole urgency. Of this message. That's as applicable today. As it was back then. Is brought before us. That we're. That's two millennia. Closer. To the end of time. When the opportunity. To take heed. Of the message of hope. Will then be too late. The message. Is urgent. What? For those of you. May not know. The Lord Jesus. As their own personal savior.

[25 : 40] Here today. Well. The situation. That. We find. And. We have been speaking about. In this passage. Speaking of these people. In the land of Zebulun.

And in the land of Naphtali. The situation. The situation. These people. We're in. Is very similar. To the spiritual situation. That you are in today. My friends. If you don't know Jesus. Because if you don't know. The Lord as your own. Personal savior. Then still that. Shadow of death. And that darkness. Is. Surrounding you. And the only way. For that shadow. And for that darkness. To be removed from you. Is from the light. Is for the light. Of the gospel. To shine. In your soul. To reveal. To you. What you need. To be in a right condition. With your maker. I ask you the question. How many times.

[26 : 37] Have you heard the gospel message? Each time you hear. The gospel message. That is an opportunity. For the light of the gospel. To dawn. In your own soul.

And each time. You refuse that message. That message. Is one less. Opportunity. That you have. To come to know. The Lord Jesus. Think of. Verse. 23 onwards. In this passage. When Jesus. Started preaching. He. Gave his message. To the people. In the different areas. That he went to. As well as preaching. He performed miracles. And. Crowds of people. Would gather around. Wherever he was. People would follow him. From one place. To the next. To see what he would do. And to listen to the words. That he would say. His theme. Was growing. All the time. Yet. Where were these. Crowds of people. When he was arrested. Where were these.

[27 : 33] Crowds of people. When he was being. Hried. And when he was being. Led out of Jerusalem. To be put to death. These people. Were nowhere to be seen. Because they gladly. Heard the message.

That Jesus. Gave to them. But they didn't do anything. With it. The message. That Jesus. Came to them. A message of hope. It wasn't deemed important. Enough. For them. To actually. Take it seriously. And to seek to apply. What Jesus said. To them. They were nowhere to be seen. The early church. Numbered. About 150 people. At the ascension. Of the Lord. Over all these people. Who had followed him. From place to place. All these people. Who had witnessed. What he had done. Who had heard about. All the different things. That he had accomplished. Yet they were nowhere to be seen. Because the message of Jesus. They listened to it. But they didn't take any notice of it. Is that the position.

[28 : 27] My friend. That you are in this evening. Are you listening. To the message of Jesus. Through the gospel. The same message. That was spoken. Thousands of years ago. The message.

To repent. To turn to God. What are you going to do. With that message. The message. Is a message of hope. Instead of being under that. Shadow. Of death. That shadow. That gets longer.

And longer. And longer. As the light goes down. As it were. As the light of the gospel. Goes down. As it's refused. Time and time again. Until the light eventually disappears. And the shadow. Is pure darkness.

It's a message of hope. Death is not. The only option. Eternal death. Is not the only option. It's the message. That the Bible gives to us. It's the greatest message.

[29 : 22] The world has ever heard. It's the greatest message. The world will ever hear. That there is a message of hope. To sinners like you and me. How do we take on board that message?

Listen to what the scriptures say. What does Jesus say? He says repent. For the kingdom of heaven is at hand. How do you repent? Go on your knees. And cry out to God. Ask him to save you.

Ask him to forgive you. Ask him to show you what you really like. And ask him to forgive you. And he will do it. It's the beauty of the gospel. All the other Christians you see around about you. That's what they have done. And they are testimony to the fact that there is power in the gospel that our Lord has here. In verse 16. It talks at the end of verse 16 about this light dawning. The light of the comfort of God's word through the prophets. The light of the gospel message through the one that all the prophets spoke about. The Lord Jesus.

[30 : 23] The light that comes into a soul when the understanding of faith in Jesus and hope for eternity fills and floods one's soul.

That's what it's like. It's like a new day. It's like a whole new experience. Whole new outlooks. It's a new experience. And it's an experience.

And it's a change in your life that will never ever be regretted. Because that power that there is in the gospel to change souls will give a new life that will last for eternity.

So that death may no longer hold such a fearful prospect. Because the result of the gospel is eternal life through Jesus. What are you going to do with the gospel message this evening, my friends?

Are you going to turn it away once again? Or are you going to listen to the voice of Jesus? Jesus says, repent. For the kingdom of heaven is at hand. May the Lord bless you.

[31 : 26] Do you have thoughts on this passage? Let us pray. Let us pray.