

Series:	Reference:	Title:	Date:
Why Church Matters	Matthew 4:12-17	It's the Kingdom's Tool	08.11.2019
Website Writeup: From the beginning of Christ's ministry He began to choose people to continue the work of kingdom building. He chose, equipped & called them. They came under his Lordship & experienced a life set apart for holiness, fidelity & faithfulness. That continues today, the wonderful call to live the life of Jesus in worship in all ways in order that His Glory would be shown among all people!			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

When I first got to Indonesia & began to learn language, I bought these little blank cards in packs of 500. I'd write an Indonesian word on one side, then the English equivalent on the other. Daily, I'd go through them reciting the Indonesian & seeing if I could remember the translation. Once I was proficient with all the cards in a pack, I'd put it on a shelf to remind myself of progress made, then start another pack. Occasionally I'd take them down to review as needed. In that way I amassed somewhere in the vicinity of 3000-5000 Indonesian words. I needed those words to live, communicate & understand Indonesian culture & worldview - given nothing reveals the worldview & culture of a people like its language & writing. Language forms us, shapes us & imbeds in us certain values, beliefs & ways of doing things. The same is with Scripture...

We've heard this passage for months now, Matthew 28:18-20. If you've not noticed, I've memorized it. This is Jesus' Last Command, which has become our first concern - referred to as The Great Commission. Memorization of God's Word is a great discipleship tool, it keeps the Words of God in the forefront of our minds, shaping & forming us spiritually. It lets us understand the mind of God, reveals His character, and forms us into His likeness - becoming one of the greatest avenues of understanding His heart. I'd like to challenge you to memorize this passage as well...

Put it on a 3X5 card, post it on your bathroom mirror, in your car, at the corner of your computer screen, or keep it in your pocket. Whenever you can, recite the reference & verse. Commit it to memory, since it's Jesus' call for every Believer in the world, as we saw He prayed & commanded last week. Let's recite it together right now...

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Mt 28:18-20)

We're 3 weeks into this series, *Why Church Matters*, banging the same drum of God's heart & call over & over, as Jesus did, given it's important. We've seen firstly, the Church matters given it represents Jesus, and secondly, it's a community bringing God's glory in

His mission to all peoples. We've been hovering around the end of His ministry & **today we go back to the beginning, looking firstly at Matthew 4:12-17** which says...

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee.

¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went & lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun & Naphtali - ¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁵ "Land of Zebulun & land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - ¹⁶ 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."

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

I love building things. I built my chicken coop, of which I am very proud. I'm no professional builder by any stretch of the imagination, but I do love doing it when the opportunity arises. It took me some time, working out problems, sweating & swinging a hammer, but now all my little french hens have a beautiful place to thrive & give me eggs! When there was nothing, and suddenly there's something, it leaves a mark. It's hard not to notice my chicken coop. And to erase its presence would take not just a little effort; it's solid & fairly large. It's here to stay.

Church matters, because it's the tool in building God's kingdom. As we've said in the past, Christ's embodied in the Church, given all the tools & equipped us to build His Kingdom for God's Glory among all people groups. I've loved laboring to build this church alongside all of you, laboring together to grow God's kingdom locally & globally. Unlike my chicken coop, that's always in-process. The work won't cease until Christ returns, establishing His kingdom here in full. Kingdom building isn't something we achieve, it's something we strive towards constantly.

Church matters because it glorifies God in worship among the nations. John Piper said, "*Worship is the goal & fuel of missions: Missions exist because worship doesn't.*" That is, worship among all nations (people groups). One day missions will cease, but worship will continue forever & it's our central purpose. Worship is central to us as a people in the mission of God.

Last week you heard for the first time this new song written by Vinny, which we're singing today again. Apparently, there are no less than 15 new songs which the worship team has written & plan to roll out over time. I'm sure you'd agree, the one we've heard is a testimony to the missional heart of this church. Since you may not know, it wasn't just Vinny who wrote that...Rachel provided him notes on what the prayer ministry's been hearing from the Lord. Rob Shaeffer has written lyrics he's sent to Vinny, which have worked their way into songs. So these are communal efforts led by the Spirit! Songs of worship, reflecting the heart of God among us, are a testimony to a growing vibrant church which is about God's glory & God's mission! When a church truly worships, it's a sign it's walking lockstep with the Spirit & Word of God!

This passage in Mt 4 follows John the Baptist quoting the same from Isaiah (40:3). In chapter 3 of Matthew, referring to Christ's coming, John also says... *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."* (and like Isaiah prophecies of Christ's coming, he also does so concerning John as the one to prepare the way) ³ *This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"* (Mt 3:2-3)

It follows Christ's baptism by John in the Jordan when John states that it should be Jesus baptizing him, not the other way around - makes logical sense to me. But Jesus countered, *"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."* (Mt 3:15)

In other words, "You have to baptize me John so that Scripture's made complete." Then, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus & a voice from heaven states, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."* (Mt 3:17) Glory, right! Which is also a quote reminiscent of Isaiah 42:1 which says, *"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations."* A verse intimately tied to the prophecy in Genesis 49:10, ¹⁰ *"The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come & the obedience of the nations shall be his."*

All language of 'obedience' & 'nations' reminding us of the Great Commission. We could keep tying Scripture to Scripture about the coming of Christ & what it means. Remember, Augustine's quoted as saying, *"The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed. The New Testament is the Old Testament revealed."* We see from these prophecies this truth very clearly - Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy & He comes ushering in the Kingdom of God. The exact thing of which He speaks so often in His ministry, and that to which He calls us in the Great Commission.

The Scriptures reveal, a coming Messiah ushering in the Kingdom reign of God. A kingdom of justice, not addressing behavior through external law, but through conviction & the reign of God in the hearts of people, producing repentance & life-change. The justice of God the Father for the sin of the world is meted out on the Son on the cross. Abused & abuser, oppressed & oppressor, both find justice satisfied & restoration extended in the cross. Justice without the cross, and the Kingdom reign of God at its core, addressing the sin of humankind, is misguided. The goal of the cross is full restoration & reconciliation of the sinner as Christ takes on the wrath of the Father on our behalf.

John the Baptist was a herald of this, one who practiced the Great Commission even before it was uttered & before Jesus' official ministry even began - that's because this call upon Israel was age old from the beginning of the Hebrew Scriptures, largely beginning with the call on Abraham in Genesis 12 & even as far back as Genesis 3 - but that's a sermon for another day.

Church matters because it makes straight paths for Jesus. John calls people to prepare their hearts to receive this Messiah, His message & life. In meeting Jesus, we're confronted with a moral & social imperative, to repent & turn from that which isn't godly, and give our lives in full to Him. Christ takes on the punishment for our sin restoring our relationship to God the Father, opening the door for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We are made righteous, which simply means we're made rightly-related to God once more due to Jesus work on the cross & the empty tomb! John's was a message of repentance, one of turning away from things which are not life-giving, and a turning towards Jesus who brings full life!

What comes with that is a transformed life, set apart for holiness - which is to reflect the heart of God in thinking & behavior, even to how we view others who are different than us. We glorify Him in our obedience! Hatred, violence & racism, are not the ways of God, rather God embraces all nations & calls His people to do the same, pursuing them with the message of Jesus for the sake of God's glory among them. So, as we pursue Jesus we naturally become a diverse people, embracing all with the love of Christ.

Likewise, God calls us to a new ethic of sexual purity, pure attitudes & personal holiness which are reflective of His nature as well. Remember we said last week, God is glorified when people lift Him up as preeminent & their lives, reflecting His commands, teachings & heart. Reflecting fidelity & faithfulness in how we act, think & live privately & corporately. A Romans 12:1-2 kind of lifestyle worship.

John considered himself a tool of the kingdom, His life was one of worship in all ways - since true worship is either reflected in everything we are, say & do, or not. He understood these things from the Scripture, and God's lead, even before the cross occurred. **We too are called to become a herald for the kingdom of God.** John was a man of purity, taking seriously his personal spiritual formation in light of his calling - a man set apart for God. And to the Sadducees & Pharisees, he expected the same, as seen in his challenge to them, *⁸Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. (Mt 3:8)* He stated, they couldn't just rely on their positional bloodline of being a part of the Jewish nation, they had to also submit themselves to Christ in all ways. Spiritual formation is important, giving up what is not of God, and adopting what is - turning from sin, to Jesus. If we're unwilling to have Jesus do a work in our heart, we can have no part of the kingdom of God. There is no salvation without His Lordship. Not that we achieve perfection, but we pursue Christ with a willingness to be changed (Rm 12:1-2).

Like John called us to, we make straight paths for Him, and we submit in obedience to Jesus life & call upon us becoming his Herald. That which is offensive to the life of Christ, and His holiness, we confess & leave at the cross. Ideas contrary to Christ, we confess & leave at the cross. We take on His life reflecting him in faithfulness & fidelity, regarding all people as those living in darkness who also need Jesus.

As a tool of the kingdom, the Church is committed to all peoples. It's no mistake, Jesus moved himself to Capernaum in the vicinity of Naphtali & Zebulan, 2 tribes of Israel, and right in the center of Gentiles, all the non-Jews. A place of diversity -

Jew & Gentile alike, living side-by-side. In a time when much of Israel had become insular & nationalistic, not regarding their call from the Hebrew Scriptures to be a light to the nations & serving only themselves. They'd become consumer-minded, nationalistic, even racist.

But Jesus moves into the neighborhood, and as a result, light has dawned on Jew & Gentile alike! It's not about them, their differences, likes & dislikes, or felt needs - it's about Jesus! Salvation has come, God has entered our reality & made His home with us now in Capernaum! Jesus is kingdom building, and all peoples, Jew & Gentile alike are His material for doing so. Since that language of 'light' & 'dawn' would've been unmistakable to Jews as language of salvation for both Jew & Gentile! Isaiah, John & Jesus Himself, through word & action, are reminding them of their call to all peoples.

The Church as God's kingdom tool brings light to the nations. Jesus moves into a place of great darkness, as some translations have it, and here it says they live in *the shadow of death*. The words aren't minced at all, played down, or sanitized - people living without the life of Christ, are living in darkness. An unpopular & politically incorrect thing to say these days, but the dislike of the statement doesn't make it any less true! It's not a critical statement of people, since we once lived in darkness too - it just reveals the need for their reconciliation with God. Christian is no better, we're just hungry beggars who've found the Bread of Life & called to share it.

Scripture clearly teaches these things...*There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*" (Acts 4:12)

"Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Rm 10:17)

"Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." (1 Jn 5:12)

As a result, Jesus commands, *"Go therefore & make disciples of all nations."* (Mt 28:19)

Christians have only showed a willingness to do our part to make that straight path in our lives, under conviction & direction of the Scriptures & the Holy Spirits lead, otherwise we'd continue to live in moral & social darkness ourselves. Coming under the kingdom reign of God as we've seen in Mt 28, Genesis 49 & various passages in Isaiah, means obedience & life-change for us to be able to live under Christ's rule - which is all the better for everyone! It's true worship, glorifying to God, since it restores humanity to what it was originally created to be, bringing peace & wholeness to relationships & life.

And we also see that in the beginning of His ministry, right away **Jesus begins to pick up & sharpen His tool of Kingdom building**. Since, immediately following His baptism, His temptation in the wilderness, and the proclamation that the kingdom has come near, Jesus begins to call His first disciples to task...

¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. (Mk 1:14–20)

He's moved into the neighborhood, established His presence. Made His kingdom purpose known, and the first thing Jesus does is grab these guys, saying... "You're my kingdom building tool, come with me & let's go fish for people!" He teaches them, equips them & prays for them as we saw last week, and remember, He prayed the same for you! Then He provides opportunity for them to do the ministry He's been doing. If we jump to Matthew 10:1, we see a little of that happening already... *Jesus called his twelve disciples to him & gave them authority to drive out impure spirits & to heal every disease & sickness.*

In kingdom building the Churches greatest power is in prayer. In the past few weeks I've challenged you to write down 3 people you can be influencing towards Christ. I've challenged you to get out, push past your fears, and do something for the sake of Christ's glory & mission. Remember, in doing these things, Jesus said... *"I chose you & appointed you," Jesus said, "that you should go & bear fruit . . . so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you"* (John 15:16).

If worship among all peoples for the sake of God's glory is the goal, then these things are right in line with His will. Prayer is your first line of offense, engage in it. Piper also said, *"One of the reasons our prayer malfunctions is that we try to treat it like a domestic intercom for calling the butler for another pillow in the den - rather than treating it like a wartime walkie-talkie for calling down the power of the Holy Spirit in the battle for souls."* This life is not about us, it's about God's Glory & God's mission - let us pray, act, speak & live to that end. **Because as we see in Romans 15:9, Jesus sends us out on mission, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.**

In conclusion, Church matters, because...

1. **It's the tool in building God's kingdom.** Consider yourself a tool in His hands.
2. **It glorifies God in worship among the nations.** Worship Jesus in everything.
3. **It makes straight paths for Jesus.** Submit to Him in all ways & be transformed.
4. **It's a called to be herald for the kingdom of God.** Be a voice for Jesus.
5. **It's committed to all peoples.** Break down barriers through sharing Jesus.
6. **It brings light to the nations.** Be light in every opportunity you find yourself.
7. **Jesus chose & equips us to be His tool of Kingdom building.** Let Him form you.
8. **Our greatest power is in prayer.** Direct your prayers to kingdom building initiatives in the people around you, and in our cross-cultural efforts as a church.

Let's be about God's glory & God's mission to see worship happen among all peoples!