

Matthew 4E

- Last week, we studied Jesus beginning His public ministry in the Galilee
 - Jesus came back from the desert and began to move from place to place, teaching and performing miraculous signs
 - He traveled to Jerusalem for the first of four Passovers during His years of ministry
 - And as He returned to the Galilee, His fame immediately began to spread and crowds began to gather
 - Moving forward today, Matthew begins to describe the impact of Jesus' ministry in the Galilee
 - In particular, Matthew focuses on five areas of impact
 - First, Matthew relates Jesus' authority as a teacher and preacher of God's word
 - Secondly, Matthew describes Jesus' power to heal the human condition
 - Thirdly, Matthew shows Jesus' authority to defeat the enemy and his demons
 - Fourthly, Matthew shows Jesus held authority over the Sabbath, and therefore over all Jewish Law and tradition
 - And finally, Matthew relates examples of Jesus' power over Creation itself
 - By describing Jesus' power in these areas, Matthew supports his main claim that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the King and ruler of Israel and of the world
 - Matthew begins this narrative focused on the most important of these areas of authority
 - Jesus' authority in teaching the Word of God
 - Because as impressive as Jesus' miracles are, they always served a greater purpose, which was to bring attention to Jesus' Words
 - That's why the next chapters of this Gospel focus on the Sermon on the Mount

- But for now, let's wrap up Matthew's narrative at the end of Chapter 4

Matt. 4:23 Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.

Matt. 4:24 The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them.

Matt. 4:25 Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

- This short passage is really an overview of Jesus' ministry in the Galilee
 - From here, Matthew will give us the details on these experiences in the chapters ahead
 - For now, let's focus on three observations
 - First, Matthew says Jesus was traveling throughout the Galilee, teaching in synagogues with His first few key disciples in tow
 - The Galilee covers about 2,800 sq. miles and in Jesus' day, it was home to about 3 million people
 - So that's a lot of territory to cover and a lot of people to reach
 - Jesus spent the better part of three years moving about this area, but He probably could have ministered for many more years
 - Mathew says Jesus taught specifically in Galilean synagogues, which were the local Jewish houses of worship
 - The only official Jewish house of worship that God established for Israel was the tabernacle, later to become the temple
 - But while Israel was in exile in Babylon without a temple, the rabbis instituted the practice of Jews assembling for worship away from the temple
 - The Hebrew word for an "assembly" is *synagogue*, so the place of assembly became known as the *synagogue*
 - This detail tells us that as Jesus preached the Gospel in the Galilee, He was searching out gatherings of religious Jews

- In other words, Jesus wasn't going to Gentiles during this early phase of His ministry
- And there were significant populations of Gentiles in and around the Galilee
- Nevertheless, Jesus was focused on converting God-fearing Jews
- The reason He focused on Jews goes back to something I taught last week
 - Jesus' Gospel proclamation was that He was the promised Messiah and He was prepared to give Israel their promised Kingdom
 - It was a good-faith offer that Israel ultimately rejected, because they rejected Jesus as their King
 - But still, Jesus' offer was sincere and legitimate, which is why Jesus sought specifically for Jews to hear it
- The second thing Matthew notes in his summary, is that Jesus did more than just preach in the Galilee
 - He also performed supernatural acts of compassionate healing for people
 - He healed people of every disease and affliction, Matthew says, demonstrating His power over the human condition
 - And these supernatural healings had a predictable effect
 - We're told in v.24, that the news of His healing power spread like a wildfire roaring through dry Galilean grasslands
 - Not only was all Galilee streaming to Jesus, but the news traveled as far north as Syria (ancient Aram) and beyond the Jordan to Gilead and Ammon
 - Which means thousands of people who suffered an illness or knew someone who did, sought out Jesus from both regions
 - And the indication here, and elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel, is Jesus was healing everyone who came to Him without discrimination and without prerequisites
 - Which is why the crowds were so huge

- Matthew gives us a brief list of the ailments Jesus healed
 - First, He healed various diseases, which refers to general physical ailments
 - Secondly, He healed pains, which literally translates as “torments” or “torture”
 - Anyone who has suffered under chronic pain understands why the Greek language refers to such pains as “torture”
- Next, Matthew mentions the healing of demoniacs
 - A demoniac was someone indwelt by a demon
 - In Jesus’ day, people understood that some maladies were not the result of natural causes, but rather of demonic activity
 - In other words, demoniacs manifested either physical or mental illness, resulting from the damage inflicted on their mind and body by demons
 - So as Jesus removed the demons, the people were made instantly well
 - We’re going to have a lot of opportunity in the future to talk more about demons and demon possession in this Gospel
- Finally, Jesus healed epileptics and paralytics
 - These are essentially opposite conditions
 - “Epileptic” was the ancient term for someone who had seizures, which are uncontrolled body movements
 - While paralytics were those who lost use of limbs
 - Jesus healed both conditions
- In Jesus’ day, there were no medical cures for these conditions
 - Even today, we still don’t have solutions to many of these diseases
 - And even in cases where we do have treatments, many of our treatments do little more than mask the symptoms
 - For example, we can’t cure seizures or paralysis in most cases

- This is especially true for demoniacs, especially since modern society doesn't even recognize this condition as real
- But Jesus' healing was a full and complete restoration of the body in all cases
 - His was a healing that distinguished Jesus as someone greater than a mere medicine man
 - Even today, in the age of science and modern medicine, miracle healings like these would be mind-blowing
- Therefore, as Jesus performed these miracles, He was making an undeniable statement of His divinity
 - Jesus was demonstrating that He possesses the power to address the human condition
 - With merely a word or touch, Jesus can bring the human body back to its ideal state, to full health
 - That ability to restore the human body to its ideal state is the unique calling card of the Creator Himself
 - Only the One Who has created the human body, possesses the power to restore us in perfection
- And this power isn't limited to our physical condition
 - Anyone who witnessed Jesus healing in this way, would have instinctively appreciated Jesus' power over the human body
 - And from that conclusion, it's just a small step to conclude logically that Jesus must also possess power to heal the soul
 - Because as sick as our bodies may be, the condition of the human soul is even sicker and even more desperately in need of healing
 - And that was the focus of Jesus' ministry and preaching: healing souls
- Remember, Jesus' healing ministry was not about making people feel better or live longer...it was about bringing people to an awareness of the Gospel
 - The Christian hope is not in physical healing...it's in knowing that by the blood of Christ shed for us, we one day escape this sinful dying body and receive eternal life in glory

- That's what we're all waiting for, to leave this corrupt body behind and enter into a new body that never dies, never sins
- In fact, one could argue that a supernatural healing could be a disappointment for the believer who knows what awaits in eternity
- Because it delays our escape from this body and prolongs our suffering in this world
- By the same token, the Lord doesn't profit from healing this sinful body so we have a more comfortable existence for a time
 - Generally speaking, the more comfortable we become in this body, the less we desire the new body
 - And the less priority we place on seeking eternal gain
- So, Jesus' compassionate healing ministry served more important, spiritual purposes
 - First, Jesus healed to establish His claims to divinity
 - His miracles validated He was *Jehovah Rapha*, the God Who heals, and therefore the Creator of the human body
- Secondly, these miracles drew an audience to Jesus' teaching
 - For obvious reasons, a ministry of free and total healing drew huge crowds
 - And then, once these crowds were gathered around Him, Jesus could teach and preach
 - So to put it simply, Jesus healed the body so He would have opportunity to heal the spirit
- This is still God's priority today in cases where the Lord may perform a miraculous healing
 - It's always for the purpose of glorifying the Healer, not pleasing the one healed
 - It draws people to the Lord as their Creator and gives opportunity for them to hear the Word of God
 - If you doubt this purpose, ask why the Lord would heal someone He allowed to experience disease in the first place

- If God's first concern was keeping our bodies disease free, then why do Christians contract illness in the first place?
 - Likewise, any teaching that suggests if you seek healing and don't get it, it must mean you didn't have enough faith – that's ridiculous, because we all die sooner or later – by that definition, we all run out of faith, or we'd never die
- Jesus gives us the answer in John 9

[John 9:1](#) As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth.

[John 9:2](#) And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?"

[John 9:3](#) Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

- That's how we need to understand Jesus' healing ministry in the Galilee
 - Jesus healed sick people to bring glory to God
- First, to show Himself as the One possessing power over, and compassion for, the human condition
- And secondly, to ensure that crowds would gather to listen to His teaching
 - Because long after our bodies have become dust, the Word of God will endure forever
- Finally, the third thing Matthew's summary shows us is how effective this strategy was
 - In v.25, Matthew says that large crowds followed Jesus
 - First, they came from around the Galilee, which generally describes the area west of the Sea of Galilee
 - And they also came from the Decapolis, which is the area east of the Jordan from Damascus to the Dead Sea
 - And they also came from Judea and Jerusalem
 - We're talking about people coming from hundreds of miles away by foot, through the desert, and during an age when there was no instant communication

- Imagine how powerful Jesus' draw must have been in that day, to bring people from so far merely by word of mouth?
- This is also why we can assume that Jesus was healing virtually everyone who came to Him
- The word was out that if you wanted restored health, it was happening in the Galilee
- Matthew's description of these huge crowds demonstrates the importance of Jesus' healing ministry in establishing His reputation quickly and powerfully
 - Jesus only has three years to accomplish all that the Father has planned for His earthly ministry
 - And in that short time, Jesus needed to move quickly from being in one moment, a nobody from a backwater town of Nazareth
 - To the next moment, being a rockstar with a very large following
 - And His healing ministry served that purpose
- Speaking of followers, we saw last week, how Jesus invited certain men to follow Him...men like Andrew, Peter, John and Philip and eventually others
 - These men believed in Jesus' claim to be Messiah, so they submitted themselves to His authority as their Rabbi
 - They left their former way of life to join Jesus in a vocational pursuit
 - But now, we hear that in the weeks and months that followed, Jesus collected hundreds or even thousands of followers
 - So we might ask, are these new followers considered Jesus' disciples also?
 - Before we answer that question, we need to understand the meaning of "disciple" in Jesus' day
 - The word itself simply means, "pupil" or "student", but today we've attached a greater meaning to the word
 - Today, when we say "disciple" of Jesus, we usually mean a believer, a person who has placed their faith in Jesus Christ

- But in Jesus' day, a disciple simply meant a student in a rabbinical school
- A disciple was a person who committed to study under a rabbi
- It would be similar to the position of a postgraduate student learning under a professor at a university today
- So disciples were vocational students, studying under a rabbi and committed to becoming like him
 - One day, when they finished their course of study, a disciple hoped to become a rabbi and lead others in a similar fashion
 - Just as university students might aspire to become a tenured professor themselves
- And like postgraduate programs today, prospective disciples had to compete to be accepted by the better rabbis
 - The more renowned a rabbi was, the more selective he could be in choosing his disciples
 - And the more competitive it was to become his disciple
- One of the more famous rabbi-student relationships of the first century was that of Rabbi Gamaliel and his student, Saul of Tarsus
 - Gamaliel was the "Harvard" or "Yale" of his day
 - And Saul (or the Apostle Paul) was a talented and ambitious disciple
 - Paul spoke in Acts of their association to give evidence of his significant academic achievements

Acts 22:3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.

- Jesus was already a renowned rabbi, and He was quickly gaining prominence for His teaching and power
 - So when Jesus called men to be His disciples, it was a high honor for them

- Remarkably, these first men Jesus called weren't even looking to be His disciples or to be disciples of any rabbi
- I imagine that becoming a rabbi's disciple was the last thing they ever imagined doing
- So when Jesus called them to be His disciples, it was probably a shock
 - It would have been as surprising as a high school dropout suddenly receiving a full scholarship to Harvard today
 - They were receiving a great honor, one they didn't request, and one that didn't depend on their scholastic achievement
- But now, many people are following Jesus without waiting for Jesus to call them as disciples
 - Later, Matthew will report that Jesus has thousands of these self-appointed followers
 - These people attached themselves to Jesus without receiving an invitation to be His disciples
 - It's like someone sitting in on a college course without bothering to enroll in the university first
 - They came for personal reasons, like healing or food or out of curiosity or other reasons
- So what we're learning is, that following after Jesus didn't require a belief in Jesus' claims as Messiah
 - The early disciples called to be His disciples did have faith in Him as Messiah, and their faith grew as they learned more
 - But Jesus didn't make that faith a prerequisite for the crowds to come to Him for healing or to hear His teaching
 - And the crowds grew, some decided to follow Him from place to place, even after they were healed
 - And some within the group even began to commit themselves to Jesus as His disciples
 - These identified themselves as Jesus' formal students, and they gave up their normal way of life to accompany Him everywhere

- And Jesus permitted them to join Him in this way, and Jesus even refers to them as His disciples
- This group of disciples will number upward of several hundred, or more, at times along the way
- Later, Jesus will make an additional distinction among His disciples, by naming twelve of them to be His apostles
- So those who surrounded Jesus in these crowds can be classified in this way
 - Following Jesus, is a large group of thousands seeking for Jesus' help or just curious to hear His teaching
 - Within this larger group, there is a smaller group of dozens or perhaps hundreds who have committed to being Jesus' disciples
 - And inside the group of disciples, there is an even smaller group of handpicked disciples who Jesus called His apostles
- But now, here's the main point to remember...in *each* of these three groups you can find both believers and unbelievers
 - As you would naturally expect, Jesus' larger group of followers included both believers and unbelievers
 - Some accepted Jesus' claims to be Messiah and were saved by that faith
 - While many others who followed Jesus had only a passing interest in His claims and teaching
 - They followed *after* Jesus, but they never placed their faith *in* Jesus Christ as their Messiah, as their Savior
 - This group eventually grows to tens of thousands of followers who celebrated Him, for a time
 - But then a short time later, these followers abandoned Jesus, particularly when the free food or healings stopped
 - They were much like people who sit in churches today
 - They come in the doors for any number of reasons, but they have never come to Jesus

- They are unbelievers, sitting in the house of God, but they are not resting in Jesus for their salvation
- Sometimes, you'll find someone who has been in church for years, yet hasn't come to faith in Jesus Christ
 - Somehow, they hung around believers, yet never encountered Jesus in a true way
 - These are the saddest examples of following without knowing
- But most of the time, pretend Christians only show up in church when times are tough, like after a disaster or in a personal crisis (or at Christmas & Easter)
 - And certainly, those are really good times to draw closer to God
 - In fact, God uses trials and crises in our lives to wake us up and to cause us to seek Him earnestly
- But, if a person's interest in God never goes further...
 - If their pursuit of God during trial never goes deeper than seeking a security blanket or looking for a foxhole to dive into when the bullets start to fly, then they never learn the lesson of the trial
 - They've wasted an opportunity to know the truth
- That's why I believe teaching the Word of God is so important in this moment, as we gather week to week
 - And it's why we do it so consistently and with such emphasis
 - The only way an unbeliever can hide out in church week after week, year after year, is if that room is devoid of the Word of God
 - Because if the Word is preached properly and consistently, then one of two things will happen
 - Either the Word of God will make an impression on the heart, such that the person recognizes the truth
 - They see themselves as sinners and in danger of receiving God's wrath
 - And so as a result, they repent, falling on their knees and accepting the grace of God in the face of Jesus Christ

- Or else, the constant presentation of the Word of God will weigh so heavily on their hard heart, that they cannot sit under its weight
 - So that eventually, they become restless and uncomfortable in the reminders that Jesus is Lord
 - And that a judgment is coming upon all who suppress the truth in unrighteousness
 - And therefore, they will jump to their feet and escape out of the building, never to return
- The one thing an unbeliever can't do under the steady and bold preaching of God's Word, is sit still and feel comfortable
 - And we don't want that either, because that's the worst possible outcome
 - To be allowed to think you have something you don't have
 - And the only way that happens, is if you remove the power of God's Word from the meeting of God's people
- Now having said that, studying the Word of God won't magically erase the evil lurking in our hearts
 - But it does equip us to deal with it, in our walk with Christ
 - First, hearing the Word of God brings a person to a saving faith, which changes the course of their eternal future
 - It awakens a dead heart to know and follow Jesus as His disciple, rather than being content to be Jesus' admirer
 - But more than that, the Word of God is also the source of our sanctification
 - The Spirit, living in us, takes the Word of God and impresses it on our hearts so that He may expose the ugliness that's inside all of us
 - So that as we enter into a study of God's Word, we come face to face with our sin nature
 - The Spirit convicts us, raising our awareness of our shortcomings so the Spirit can then work in us to scrape that sin away

- We will be washed by the water of the Word so that, in time, we are more and more like the One we follow
- So it's not surprising that many within that larger crowd were not believing
 - But you're probably surprised to know that some of Jesus' formal students, His disciples, were also not believing in Him, at least not at first
 - Remember, believing in Jesus as Messiah was not a prerequisite for becoming His disciple
 - Some of Jesus' disciples believed in Him *before* Jesus called them...men like Andrew
 - And others probably did not come to faith in Jesus as Messiah until after they were already disciples...men like Matthew himself
 - And for the same reason, there were those who Jesus called as His disciples who *never* came to faith
 - We see evidence of this in John's Gospel
 - After Jesus taught that His followers must eat His flesh and drink His blood (speaking spiritually, not literally) the crowd objected
 - They thought He was calling for cannibalism, and some began to grumble and reconsider whether to follow Jesus
 - So Jesus says this to them

[John 6:64](#) "But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.

[John 6:65](#) And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."

[John 6:66](#) As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.

- As soon as following Jesus became too challenging or inconvenient, these fell away
 - That's the expected result...that if we don't have our faith rooted in Jesus Christ as our Savior, then sooner or later, we lose interest in what He's offering
- I'm sure you remember the parable Jesus taught in Luke 8 of the four soils

- In the parable, Jesus taught that the Word of God falls on the human heart like a seed falling on the ground
 - And the result depends on the nature of the person's heart, or their response to that Word
 - Some hearts are soft and prepared to receive that Word truly, to believe it sincerely
 - These embrace the truth and receive Jesus in faith, becoming a lifelong disciple
 - And as they do, new life springs forth and comes to maturity, such that the person bears spiritual fruit
- Other hearts are so hard, that the Word of God can't penetrate
 - They hear, but they don't listen
 - And as a result, they reject the message and remain spiritually dead and lifeless
 - And in the future, they will experience the consequences of unbelief, which is eternal judgment under the wrath of God
- But in that parable, Jesus also teaches about two additional outcomes that sit in-between these two extremes
 - These middle conditions are murky and harder to decipher and so, they can be easily misunderstood
 - In particular, the second of these conditions describes a heart's response to the Word that looks promising at first
 - They hear the Word of God and respond, showing interest and even commitment
 - But in time, difficulties cause them to withdraw their support for Jesus
 - This person is like one of those disciples of Jesus who began following with enthusiasm. but left Jesus when His Words were too difficult to accept
 - As a result, they reveal themselves to be among the unbelieving disciples
 - They pursued Jesus for earthly reasons, not spiritual reasons

- And when Jesus ceased meeting their earthly desires, they lost interest in Him
- Increasingly, I think this is the state of church gatherings today
 - In churches all over the world, we are amassing buildings full of disciples for Jesus
 - But many of these so-called disciples are coming entirely for earthly reasons
 - And in times of testing, or when their earthly dreams aren't fulfilled as they expected, they move on
- How is this possible?
 - Because the Word of God is not faithfully preached on Sundays in many churches today
 - And as a result, rooms fill with hearts who have imagined a Jesus according to their own desires
 - These people are disciples of Jesus only in the simple sense that they are students of a false Jesus, one that isn't grounded in Scripture
- So that when the miracles they were promised fail to materialize, or when the price of following Jesus becomes too great, they too fall away
 - They are part of the apostasy that Paul said would accompany the last days of the Church
 - These are unbelieving "disciples" who leave the Church, because they never truly came to Jesus
- And finally, this pattern of unbelievers hiding among believers also held true for the twelve disciples named as apostles
 - One of these twelve was not believing in Jesus, either: Judas Iscariot
 - John tells us this in John 6

[John 6:67](#) So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?"

[John 6:68](#) Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.

[John 6:69](#) "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."

[John 6:70](#) Jesus answered them, “Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?”

[John 6:71](#) Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him.

- Jesus handpicked these twelve men to become part of His inner circle of disciples
- And yet, as Jesus says plainly, He selected one of these men knowing He was a “devil”, meaning an unbeliever
- Much later in our study of Matthew, we’ll come back to the question of why Jesus selected an unbeliever to be among the first apostles
 - So the point to understand tonight, is simply that those who followed Jesus have always included those who were not what they seemed
 - They were disciples in appearance only
 - Yet Jesus allowed them to accompany Him, just as He allows unbelievers to associate within the Church body today
- As Jesus teaches in the parable of the wheat and the tares, for a time, the Lord allows the two types of followers to mix
 - For the time has not yet come for Him to sift out the unbeliever
 - For now is the time of salvation, and the Lord won’t cut the time short
 - But in time, the window for salvation will close, and that separation will happen
 - As the writer of Hebrews reminds us

[Heb. 4:1](#) Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.

- Why are you following Jesus? What did you come for?
 - Did someone promise you some wealth or health or trick?
 - Smells and bells in some high church cathedral?

- Mysticism? Romanticism?
- Entertainment? (I know you're not here for that)
- If those things are your principal causes for your relationship with Jesus, you do not have a relationship with Jesus
 - On the other hand, if you know yourself, as the Scriptures describe it
 - A person who has nothing good in the heart
 - Eternally evil, as all human beings are
- And you know that's not God-pleasing
 - You know one day, someone is going to hold you accountable to the Law
 - And that someone is going to be Jesus Christ
 - If you know that's true, then you have every reason to repent and accept His mercy – because He hasn't come in judgment yet
 - And you're not dead yet...so there's still time
 - That's coming to know Christ as a disciple, and as a believer