



# *The King's Ransom*

Matthew 20:28

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Text

Matthew 4:12-25

Topic

Jesus calls two sets of brothers to follow Him

Title

*"O Brothers, Come Follow Now"*

## Introduction

If you want to win at *Monopoly*, the first thing you need to do is get over wanting to buy Boardwalk and Park Place. Try to get hotels on Illinois Avenue as fast as you can.

In 1997 Dr. Irvin R. Hentzel of Iowa State University listed the properties where people were most likely to land. Here's the list he came up with:

- |                     |                        |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Illinois Ave     | 5. Reading Railroad    |
| 2. B&O Railroad     | 6. St. James Place     |
| 3. Tennessee Avenue | 7. Water Works         |
| 4. New York Avenue  | 8. Pennsylvania Avenue |

If you're familiar with the game board, you might also notice that all three orange properties are in that list. That's due to their relationship to Jail. Players emerging from lock-up are more likely to land in that strip than any other part of the board.

Boardwalk and Park Place are conspicuously absent. They might have the highest rent, but they simply don't have the traffic.

If I'm not mistaken, the cheapest property is Mediterranean Avenue, at a cost of \$60.00 in funny money.

Now to our text in Matthew. The Jews were expecting their Messiah. They assumed He would establish Himself as King in Jerusalem. It was the equivalent, to them, of Boardwalk.

Jesus ended-up in Capernaum in the region of Galilee. It definitely was *not* Boardwalk. It wasn't even Mediterranean Avenue. It was a notorious region with a heavy Gentile influence that made it undesirable for Jews. It was called a region of "darkness" where people lived under "the shadow of death."

Why did Jesus establish Himself there? It was because His offer of the kingdom to the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea had been rejected.

In fact, the entire ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus in the South seemed to have failed.

Ever feel like what you are doing for The Lord has failed or is failing? Then pay attention.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 On The Surface You Might Think That The Kingdom Of Heaven Has Failed, but #2 In Your Service You Must Trust That The Kingdom Of Heaven Prevails.

## #1 On The Surface You Might Think That The Kingdom Of Heaven Has Failed

(v12-16)

Matthew just told the story of Jesus's triumph over the devil in the desert. On the heels of that great victory came what looked to be a notable failure.

Mat 4:12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee.

Matthew's Gospel is more topical than it is chronological. About a year had transpired between verses eleven and twelve. The impression of John's preaching and baptism was wearing off. Herod Antipas, who a few months earlier would not have dared to do so, had John the Baptist arrested and imprisoned to await his beheading.

John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way of the Lord, to open the door of Jerusalem and Judea for His coming. At first he met with great success. Tens or perhaps even hundreds of thousands came to repent and be baptized. Then, just like that, he was jailed.

Mat 4:13 And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali,

Jesus first went to His hometown of Nazareth in Galilee. The little phrase, "and leaving Nazareth," wouldn't fly in the No Spin Zone. The circumstances of Jesus leaving Nazareth were extreme.

One Saturday in the synagogue in Nazareth Jesus read from Isaiah and claimed to be the person spoken of in the text.

Luk 4:28 So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,

Luk 4:29 and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff.

Luk 4:30 Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.

That doesn't sound too successful, does it? In the Gospel of Mark we're told, "and he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them" (6:5).

"Leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum... in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali..." These were the tribes of Israel who had inherited for their possession the outermost regions of the Promised Land, bordering the Gentiles. During the conquest of the land under Joshua these tribes had failed to drive out the Gentiles.

Over the centuries they were constantly the first to be invaded until, by the time of Jesus, there was a heavy Gentile population and influence.

John was in prison and Jesus seemed on the ropes. Was this all a spiritual failure? Seemed like it was, but no, it wasn't, because it was foreseen by the prophet Isaiah centuries before.

Mat 4:14 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

Mat 4:15 "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES:

Mat 4:16 THE PEOPLE WHO SAT IN DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT, AND UPON THOSE WHO SAT IN THE REGION AND SHADOW OF DEATH LIGHT HAS DAWNED."

The region was so influenced by them that it was called "Galilee of the Gentiles." If you lived there you were in "the shadow of death," sitting in spiritual "darkness."

Jews who lived in Galilee of the Gentiles were considered outcasts. The Gentiles were considered outlaws, from the standpoint that they had nothing to do with the Law of Moses.

Matthew drew upon this text from Isaiah to show that not only was it not a failure that their Messiah was in Capernaum - they ought to have expected Him to go there. Isaiah had looked down through history and had foreseen the Messiah setting up His headquarters there. He would be the "great light," bringing them the "dawn" of a new era, the kingdom of Heaven.

A Jew would demand some reasonable explanation of why the Messiah was in Capernaum and not Jerusalem; and this was it.

We have the benefit of the completed Word of God. We have the whole story. We've read the ending. We know, for example, that perilous times are in store for us during the last days. We know that the church age is mostly a time to expect tribulation and persecution.

But we also know that the gates of Hell cannot prevail against us. We know The Lord is coming to resurrect and rapture His church, that He will return after the seven year Great Tribulation to establish the kingdom that He had to delay when the Jews rejected Him in His first coming.

We know there will be new heavens, and a new earth, where we will dwell in righteousness forever and ever.

But today, right now, you may feel a complete spiritual failure. Things may not be working out the way you thought they would, as a Christian. You might even be honest enough to suggest God's promises to you seem to have failed - or, at least, you can't see how they can possibly be fulfilled.

No one of us can see how all things are working together for the good. It's far too complex. We must wait patiently on The Lord.

I **can** say that a text like this, which reveals that our Lord Himself, as well as His forerunner, seemed to have failed, is extremely encouraging. It reminds us that although sin and unbelief can seem to derail God's plans, they never ultimately overrule His gracious, merciful dealings with us. He who has begun a good work in you will definitely complete it - no matter the obstacles.

## #2 In Your Service You Must Trust That The Kingdom Of Heaven Prevails

(v17-25)

Jesus had waited thirty years, living in relative obscurity, to be identified for Who He really was. He had gone out into a barren wilderness, a no-man's-land, to engage the devil himself in a fierce single combat. He emerged from it victorious, having won each round of the fight unanimously.

He began to minister in Jerusalem and Judea. In the year Matthew overlooks, for example, Jesus went into the Temple and, for the first of two times, He overturned the tables of the moneychangers.

But for all that, John was seized, imprisoned; and Jesus moved back home to Nazareth where the townspeople didn't believe in Him and tried to murder Him.

Finding Himself in Capernaum, Jesus seemed undaunted by these events.

Mat 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

We took one entire message to discuss repentance. It is a change of mind toward sin and the Savior that results, if genuine, in a change in behavior.

It is not a work; it is not something you must do in order to be saved. At the same time, God doesn't force you to repent, and no one can repent for you. Grace works upon your heart, and your will is freed to respond.

Jesus had lost none of His zeal to serve His Father. Circumstances surrounding His ministry did not deflate Him. Even though He had been rejected in Jerusalem and Judea, and nearly murdered in Nazareth, the Gospel had not failed.

I can't stress enough that this phrase, "the kingdom of Heaven is at hand," is a declaration of war against the god of this world and the kingdom of darkness he rules. Jesus was making an advance against the devil to save souls and set captives free.

He understood that there would be skirmishes and battles along the way that would call for adjustments in His methods but that could not prevail against His message.

Jesus remained so confident in the Gospel that He recruited others to help Him in spreading the message.

Mat 4:18 And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.

Mat 4:19 Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Mat 4:20 They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

If you read the Gospel of John you will find that Andrew had already introduced Peter to Jesus sometime during the year that Matthew skips.

There's a third calling of these guys a little later on, when Jesus makes them apostles. Charles Spurgeon summarizes these three events by saying they were first *converted*, then *called*, then *commissioned*.



Jesus called them, suddenly and profoundly, to "follow" Him. They would understand that to mean they would accompany Him, serve Him, learn from Him; or as we summarize it, they would be His **disciples**.

They were fishermen; Jesus would make them "fishers of men." It's a great illustration, but just one of many that describe the workers of the Gospel.

What I get out of it is that Jesus meets you right where you are and calls you to serve Him.

He didn't say, for example, "You are fishermen and once you finish seminary I can use you to serve Me."

Am I against formal seminary? Not really. It's just that in our culture we assume that if someone is called they *require* formal training before they can truly be useful to the Lord.

I'm against, or maybe just aghast, at the modern trend to overlook the anointing of the Holy Spirit in favor of some type of formal training that has been developed by well-meaning men who nevertheless are ignoring the Holy Spirit.

One of my very favorite lines in all the Book of Acts is when the religious leaders can't figure out how the disciples are ministering with such boldness and power. "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

Unschooling and ordinary men, women, and children are *never* to be thought of as spiritually deficient. Just "be with Jesus" and He will use you.

Jesus said, "I will **make** you fishers of men." It was His promise, and His responsibility, to teach them and to equip them for their calling. All they had to do was follow Him.

Jesus called another set of brothers that already knew Him - who had already been converted.

Mat 4:21 Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, Mat 4:22 and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

The emphasis of the two accounts seems to the sudden and radical departure of these men from their everyday lives and livelihood to follow Jesus.

Put yourself, as much as possible, in the sandals of these four fishermen. The kingdom of Heaven had been announced by the rightful herald. The King had come on the scene.

You met Him and were ready to take your place in the kingdom He would establish sitting on David's throne in Jerusalem.

Then, suddenly, John's preaching started to wear-off. John was imprisoned. Jesus moved North and was nearly killed by the synagogue worshippers in His hometown.

In Capernaum, in the most unlikely place imaginable, Jesus calls you to follow Him in furthering the kingdom of Heaven on the earth.

Would **you** suddenly and radically depart from your life and livelihood?

The truth is, **everyday** Jesus calls you to suddenly and radically follow Him to further the kingdom. It may not be a call to leave everything behind and go into full-time Christian work. It's mostly a call to be obedient right where you are - at home, at work, in school. It's a call to speak up, to take a stand; or to be stirred-up, to step forward and serve as unto The Lord.

Those 'calls' are every bit as profound as a call to making a change in your vocation. They are calls to change *within* your vocation - calls to what the Puritans called 'vocational ministry.' It is adopting the perspective that Jesus can and will call upon you right where you are to serve Him.

Mat 4:23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.

Historians describe Galilee as consisting of about two hundred villages each with a population of several hundred or up to fifteen thousand.

Jesus "went about all Galilee" for the next sixteen months ministering to as many as three million Jews and Gentiles.

He would "[teach] in their synagogues." Of course, those in the synagogues were Jews or Gentile converts (called proselytes).

He probably taught the way He had in Nazareth - showing that the Scripture was being fulfilled by Him.

"Preaching the Gospel of the kingdom" is a general summary of His ministry but may describe Jesus in settings outside of the synagogues.

"Healing" was a prominent part of His ministry. The scope of His healing ministry is amplified in verse twenty-four.

Mat 4:24 Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them.

You don't need to analyze each of the conditions beyond seeing that some were physical and others were supernatural; and sometimes they were a combination of both.

The takeaway from this description is that Jesus *could* and *did* heal *everyone* from *everything*. There were no incurable conditions from any cause.

Scholars aren't completely sure what is meant by "Syria," but it's safe to say these were Gentile territories. Salvation may be to the Jew first, but by His choice of ministering in Galilee Jesus was able to demonstrate that God was not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to eternal life.

Mat 4:25 Great multitudes followed Him - from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

"Great multitudes" again were being affected. Once again there was initial outward success.

I don't need to remind you that for all the initial outward success, in the end everyone would scatter. The crowds would turn hostile. Judas would betray Jesus; Peter would deny Him. Only John, of the apostles, would be at the Cross.

The truth of the Gospel doesn't depend upon its outward success at any one point in time. In almost any of the accounts we have of saints that have preceded us there is what appears, at least for a time, to be failure.

But every time, without fail, God prevails.

All things really are working together for the good. God really will complete the good work He has begun in you. You are predestined to be changed into the image of Jesus Christ. You will awaken in eternity in His likeness. A mansion is under construction for you in Heaven.

In the mean time, don't allow anything to separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Follow Him!