

FISHERS OF MEN

Matthew 4:12-25

So far, Matthew has presented Jesus as both Israel's King, and the perfect example of what Israel was always meant to be. Here *at last* is the one who is going to lead God's people back to blessing and righteousness. Their long, dark time of torment is finally coming to an end. Or is it? It depends on whether they "see the light"-- and how they respond when they do! But it's time to put the challenge...

Read Matthew 4:12-17. Jesus is "going public" for the first time.

a. Where does Jesus set up his "base of operations," and why?

Matthew quotes again from Isaiah, who warns Israel of the destruction God is going to bring on them at the hand of the King of Assyria. "The Lord is about to bring against them... the King of Assyria with all his pomp," says Isaiah. (Isa 8:7) Remember, "Israel" at this time was split into two sections, "Israel" and "Judah." The ten tribes of Israel were carried off into exile by the Assyrians; the two tribes making up Judah were later taken into exile in Babylon. Nevertheless, says Isaiah, whatever happens there's still a light at the end of the tunnel!

Read Isaiah 9:1-7. *Zebulun and Naphtali*, the area known as "Galilee of the Gentiles," was ultimately the first area to be crushed by the Assyrians. But it's also going to be the first area to "see the light" of a new dawn!

b. According to Matthew 4:12-17, what is the "light" that has dawned on the people living in darkness?

c. Recall **Deuteronomy 30:1-6.** (Getting familiar? Should be!) What is it that the people of Israel will need to do for God's blessing to be restored?

What is Jesus calling on Israel to do in his first public words? (Does your answer match "c" above?)

Compare this with the summary of John the Baptist's preaching. How popular was John's message? (Look back at Mt 4:12 for a hint!)

Read Matthew 4:18-22.

d. According to this passage, how do you become a member of the NEW "people of God"?

e. Keeping the mission of Jesus to Israel at the front of your thinking, what is Jesus asking these first disciples to do?

f. What will it mean to be "fished for", and how will you know you're hooked?



Read Matthew 4:23-25. Though there are plenty of Gentiles around in “Galilee of the Gentiles”-- and especially in the cities of the Decapolis -- notice that Jesus in focusing his teaching on the Jewish synagogues. (Isaiah says that even the Gentiles will see the great light, and many do, which is lucky for us!) But first, Jesus has a message for his own people, the Jews. And that message is the “*good news*” of Isaiah 61. Take a look at Isaiah's words:

¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me **to preach good news to the poor**. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to **comfort all who mourn**, ³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion - to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendour.

In the next study we'll see these key phrases repeated by Jesus in his famous Sermon on the Mount. But for now, notice that Jesus is in a very practical way binding up the broken hearted! In the person of Jesus, the ultimate healer and comforter is walking among his people. With Jesus around, pain is gone, disease is gone, distress is gone, demons are gone no wonder news spreads all around the region. Large crowds gather around, aware that the times the prophet Isaiah spoke about are finally at hand, and ready to hear Jesus teach them about righteousness. The good news is, in Jesus, the blessings of God's kingdom are ready to be restored. The question remains... how will God's people, the Jews, respond? But more of that next time.

The disciples were called to join Jesus in “*fishing for men*.” That involved calling Israel to return to their God (to repent), and pursue righteousness.

h. What will “fishing for men” look like in our context today?

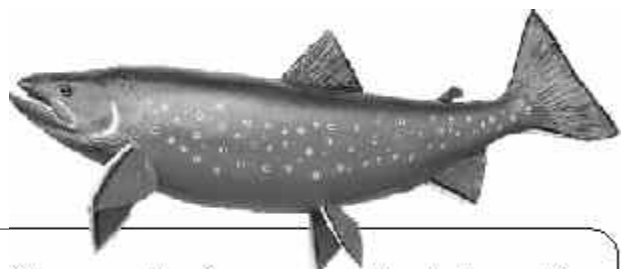
How is the mission of Christian disciples different in 21st century Australia?

How is the mission the same?

i. What do the first disciples leave behind to join Jesus in his mission?

Is there anything you'd be prepared to leave behind for the sake of Jesus and his righteousness?

Are there things you hold on to that somehow prevent you from following Jesus?



For next time...

Read the whole “Sermon on the Mount” from Matthew 5 to 7 in preparation for our explorations in the next few weeks. What sort of righteousness is Jesus looking for in the “new Israel”? How will it be different to the model of righteousness they are more familiar with?