



Matthew 4:23

23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

Today a thirty year old middle eastern carpenter, with a couple of fisherman at his right, and another couple of fishermen on his left, set out to conquer the world – which makes for a very unlikely scenario. They're

out to convince the whole world that this carpenter is God's son, the one that history has been waiting for, the rightful king of the world, who's come to claim what is rightfully his – which makes for a very unlikely scenario. Here's how it plays out.

They travel throughout Galilee, a region of about 300,000 people, made up of more than 200 towns and villages. It's a densely populated region of tenant farmers, day labourers and fisherman. The farmers grow wheat, olives and wine. The fisherman trade in fresh as well as dried fish. Some work for themselves but most work for a very rich upper class. The area is known as Galilee of the Gentiles ('Gentile' just means non-Jew), but there are quite a lot of Jews scattered throughout the region, especially in the areas that Jesus concentrates on. And so a thir-

ty year old carpenter and four fishermen set out to convince people that this carpenter is the son of God – surely and almost impossible feat. And yet, in less than two years Jesus pulls it off, and changes the world forever. And today's passage shows us how it all began. Jesus went about it in three ways: he taught in synagogues, he preached the good news, and he healed disease and sickness amongst the people. Let's look at each of these in turn.

Firstly, Jesus taught in the synagogues. In today's artwork, at the top of the first page, you can see a picture of the synagogue at Capernaum in Galilee. Try and imagine this synagogue brand new and filled with Jewish people and converts to Judaism come together on Saturday to worship God. A precious scroll would be unfolded, people didn't have bibles at home and many couldn't read, so

God's word would be read aloud from a precious scroll, and then usually a visiting Rabbi would speak from the text. It was Jesus' habit to enter a town and then go and teach in their synagogue. This was common practice for travelling Rabbi's; but not for carpenters. You can imagine them looking him up and down, the local religious leaders looking down their noses at him – what's a carpenter with no formal education, and some travelling fisherman, doing addressing us in our synagogue. That is, up until the point that Jesus opens his mouth and begins to teach them from the Scriptures. He would have taught with an authority and familiarity and passion the likes of which they'd never seen. He would have taught like he'd written the very words himself – because he did – he would have taught as if the very words of Scripture themselves were about him – because they were. And just like

those fishermen left everything at a word, as Jesus, the word become flesh, teaches God's word, the Scriptures would have come to life like never before. God's word, living and activating calling out to people like never before, 'Repent, leave off your old ways, turn and repent for the kingdom of God is here.'

Secondly, Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom. Now if Jesus was teaching in the synagogues, teaching people familiar with the Old Testament scriptures about the kingdom of God, well out in the streets he was preaching the good news of the kingdom to those who weren't as familiar with the Scriptures – he was teaching in the synagogues and preaching in the streets. Jesus was preaching 'the good news' which is the same word in the Greek, the original language of the New Testament, for 'gospel.' Jesus was preaching

the gospel, the good news of the kingdom. He would have done so in simpler language, language that Jew and Gentile alike could understand, language filled with rich illustrations taken from daily life that explained so clearly the nature of the kingdom of heaven, how incredible it was that it is now here in him, and how important it is to become part of it. He would have explained in his preach how in bringing in the kingdom of God, God was working to fix everything, to set everything right, to bring an end to Satan, sin and death and usher in a new age where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

But of course no-one would have believed any of this without proof. And so thirdly, Jesus backed up what he was saying with proof. He healed people with sickness and disease.

Historians today agree that this is the only explanation for the crowds that Jesus drew. He really did have remarkable powers of healing. But Jesus didn't come to heal, he came to preach, but imagine the authority his miracles gave to his preaching. 'The world is sick with sin and I've come to heal the world, don't believe me, well let me show you (and he'd heal someone). How about now?' 'I've come to bring an end to death. Don't believe me, well let me show you, (and he'd raise someone from the dead), well how about now? And so Jesus came teaching, and preaching and healing.

And you know, this verse, Matthew 4:23, is a summary of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, and it's also a bit of a bookend to the next five chapters right up to Chapter 9:35 which is almost identical to Matthew 4:23. Both vers-

es say Jesus came teaching and preaching and healing. And between these two book-ends we see Jesus teaching and preaching in Matthew 5–7, and then we see him healing in Matthew 8–9. And all this adds up to one thing – this man is who he says he is. And that’s how a 30 year old carpenter from the deadbeat town of Galilee, with nothing to recommend him, convinces the entire world, billions of people since having lived and died convinced; this he how he convinces them that he is the son of God, the rightful king and saviour of this world, and the only way to eternal life in heaven with the Father.

Why not take some time now to think about the teaching of Jesus, the gospel of Jesus, and the way Jesus’ actions have changed human history forever? History, very literally is ‘his story.’ Think about how his teaching, and

the good news of salvation through him as changed the face of the world forevermore. You don't have to think too far: our legal system, the printing press, world literacy, education, the equality of men and women, the rights of children, the abolition of slavery, world charities, the red 'cross,' aid agencies, some of our most beautiful art, literature and architecture, our annual holidays – even today's date the 7 March 2016 AD – anno Domini, in the year of our Lord. Just look around you and see how Jesus has profoundly altered the course of this world forever; and he's barely begun!

And when you're done reflecting over this passage spend some time praising God for Jesus: for his teaching, for his gospel, and for his church. Spend some time enjoying God, praising his son and basking in his Spirit, com-

mit your day to him and ask for his help in taking the good news of the gospel of Jesus with you today to his glory, to your great joy, and to the benefit of everyone around.

And I'll see you again tomorrow.