

Matthew 4:12-17

*The Call of Repentance, Answering the Call of the Kingdom, Part 1 of 3
By Joshua Claycamp*

“Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

‘The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.’

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 4:12–17, ESV)

Introduction: Emergency 9-1-1 brings Emergency Responders

On October 14, 1987, Jessica was an 18-month-old toddler playing with a group of children at the home of her aunt, who made money by babysitting children in Midland, a town caught in an economic recession in southwest Texas. Baby Jessica’s mother, Reba “Cissy” McClure, had gotten married at the very young age of 16 to Chip McClure and was just 17 years old at the time.

Cissy McClure, who helped her sister with the babysitting business, left the group of playing children briefly to go in the house and answer the phone. When she came back, she found the children were looking down an abandoned and dry well that had been dug years earlier and covered with a flower pot. The flower pot was missing. Confused, Cissy McClure walked over to the hole in the ground and looked down. She didn’t see anything except shadows and darkness.

It wasn’t until seventeen year old Cissy McClure looked up from the well and counted the number of children standing there that it began to dawn on her that something was wrong.

Within hours the story spread around the world. One by one different emergency rescue teams began to gather to assist in the rescue. The first to arrive were the boys in blue, officers from the Midland Police Department, and they arrived within minutes of the 911 phone call. Very soon afterward there came the Midland Fire Department. By the next day some of the leading specialists in drilling and excavation would gather to this abandoned shaft from around the world.

When news spread of a helpless little girl trapped deep in a well, emergency personnel from all over the world descended upon the scene to help, and viewers from around the globe tuned in to watch the daring rescue. Anyone who could do anything came to help for the sake of delivering baby Jessica. We

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find the same thing happening here between Jesus and the Baptist. Jesus went to the banner of the Baptist and worked alongside of him, supporting John the Baptist's Ministry.

The Unity of the Kingdom Call: The Partnership of Jesus and the Baptist

Look at the first word in verse 12: "Now when...." The verse implies that Jesus was with John the Baptist for some period of time. What was he doing hanging around with John the Baptist? What were they up to? What was going on? Turn with me to John 3:22-4:3.

"After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized (for John had not yet been put in prison). Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease." He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again for Galilee."
(John 3:22–4:3)

Many people believe that you can be a Christian without making any definite commitment to anything. Today's Canadian cities are packed with people who claim to have faith in Jesus Christ, yet who never participate in any worship service, never fellowship with other believers, and never invest in anything beyond themselves.

But this is not what we find when we look at Jesus. Now, we all revere Him. We all love Him, and we all worship Him as the Savior of the world. When people look at Jesus as proclaiming the Gospel of the

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Kingdom they expect that He is starting something brand new that has never been seen before. But this isn't the case. Jesus is not starting from scratch.

Jesus' Conversion. We had back in Matthew 3 an extensive discussion of the ministry that was actually begun by John the Baptist, and Jesus came to the Baptist in order to be baptized by him. Jesus submits himself to the baptism of John, and embraces the ministry of John by submitting to it. Jesus, by undergoing John's Baptism, is identified with lost humanity. Although Christ has no need of salvation, he is converting or going through a sort of conversion at the hands of the Baptist, by submitting to his baptism. Now John's preaching centered around the idea of "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," (Matthew 3:2). This means that Jesus' baptism, His conversion, is an embrace of the Kingdom of Heaven.

From John 3 we see that Jesus, having been baptized by John the Baptist, begins to preach in the Judean wilderness in the exact manner of John the Baptist. He embraces the ministry of the Baptist and begins to preach powerfully in such a way that more and more of John's disciples begin to follow Jesus. And we also see that the disciples continued the practice of Baptism under Jesus' direction and supervision although Jesus is said not to directly baptize anyone himself. Jesus is working alongside the Baptist, having embraced the Baptist's call of the coming Kingdom of Heaven.

The Call of the Kingdom is a singular call that unites people if it is heard correctly. Unity is one result of the Kingdom's call to repentance.

The danger is that we may overlook the fact that this was *started by John the Baptist*. Jesus hears the call of repentance and is drawn from Nazareth in the north down south to Judea where the Baptist is preaching. Jesus has no need for repentance, having never sinned. Nevertheless he hears the call of repentance and the proclamation of the imminent Kingdom of Heaven, and Jesus responds! The Call of Repentance has even drawn our King together to the Baptist who first started proclaiming the Call of the Kingdom.

Application: Hearing the Call of God, the Call of the Kingdom, the Call of Repentance must draw us together to the ones who are proclaiming it! Jesus, the King, was drawn to the Baptist by the message he was proclaiming. If our King was drawn to the Baptist by the Call of the Kingdom, then are we correctly hearing the call? The King's sinless response was to draw near to the Baptist and to partner with him in his ministry. What is our response to hearing the message? Too often our response to the call of our King is to stay at home, make excuses for why we can't go to ourselves, and then by default, to make excuses for why we cannot call others. Not only do we not respond to the Emergency 9-1-1 call of the Kingdom, but we do not honor the call of the Kingdom by engaging in the service it demands of us.

Illustration: Strengthening the Hand of Others in God

"And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my

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father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this.” And the two of them made a covenant before the LORD. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home.” (1 Samuel 23:16–18, ESV)

Despite the family relationships and typical patriarchal allegiances that existed, Jonathan knows that he has duty to strengthen David’s hand, “in God.” Jonathan rebels against his own father in order to support the man who is in the right before the Lord.

Jesus does the exact same thing. Jesus strengthens the hand of the Baptist! It’s not at all different from the gathering of rescuer workers around an 18 inch wide abandoned water shaft in the west Texas town of Midland. In the same way that rescuers from all around the world will flock to aid in the delivery of a trapped little girl, Jesus joins with the Baptist to bear witness to the coming Kingdom. Jesus witnesses and bears witness to the preaching of the Baptist, and He embraces and affirms the testimony of the Baptist. As Jesus drew near to strengthen the hand of the Baptist, once you hear the call of the Kingdom you also will be compelled to draw near to strengthen the hands of the one issuing the call.

If we correctly hear the Call of God’s Kingdom then we know that the call of the Kingdom is to enjoy the fellowship and friendship of God’s people, but not to stop there. We must also labor alongside of them for the sake of our King by endeavoring to echo their message, and to bring others to hear the message, and to bring that message to others. Jesus himself labored alongside the Baptist for the sake of His own Kingdom. If this labor was not beneath him, why is it beneath us?

Loyalty: Christ’s effort for the Cause of the Kingdom means that He stands with the Baptist until the Baptist has finished his work.

*“Now **when** he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.”*

Jesus doesn’t leave until the Baptist is arrested. Even though he is increasing and the Baptist is decreasing in terms of followers, Jesus stays with the Baptist until his arrest. Jesus faithfully stays in the region that the Baptist is ministering in until his arrest. Jesus demonstrates loyalty here.

The Light Shines Forth breaking against the Deepest Darkness

When the Baptist’s ministry ended, Jesus went where the darkness was greatest. He leaves after the Baptist’s ministry is ended, and then goes to begin His ministry in earnest.

And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled.”

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““The land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”” (Matthew 4:15–16, ESV)

Galilee: The Land that Nobody Wants

Galilee had always had a history of undesirability:

“At the end of twenty years, in which Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the LORD and the king’s house, and Hiram king of Tyre had supplied Solomon with cedar and cypress timber and gold, as much as he desired, King Solomon gave to Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee. But when Hiram came from Tyre to see the cities that Solomon had given him, they did not please him. Therefore he said, “What kind of cities are these that you have given me, my brother?” So they are called the land of Cabul to this day.” (1 Kings 9:10–13, ESV)

As “reward” to Hiram for his generosity, Solomon basically attempted to stick him with the unwanted cities of Galilee. But even King Hiram doesn’t want these cities. As a result of the general disdain held for these regions by the people, the tribal areas of Zebulon and Naphtali, Galilee, became a buffer state. The northern tribes of Israel had only really enjoyed peace under the rule of King David. We learn that following Israel’s civil war and the dividing of the kingdom the northern tribes of Zebulon and Naphtali were used as a buffer zone between the Kings of Israel and the ever encroaching armies of Assyria and Babylon. See Map.

They also engaged in some of the most rampant idolatry. The worst of the idolatry came just prior to the Assyrian conquest and the context from Isaiah 8 and 9, which is quoted here in Matthew, gives the reader the distinct impression that God allows them to be conquered by Assyria as a punishment for their idolatry and breaking covenant faithfulness with Him.

Distrust & Continued Hardship

Mixed Population: Now let’s consider these people in Matthew 4. These are the people to whom Jesus comes. At the time of Jesus’ arrival, these communities are mixed, hence the designation “Galilee of the Gentiles.” They have a majority Jewish population but there is a significant population of Gentiles living in the region as well. These Gentiles have been around for some time dating all the way back to the original Assyrian invasion and then the following Babylonian invasion. We know that, due to the gentile influx into the region, the religious leaders of Jerusalem held the Gentile Jews in suspicion. They didn’t exactly trust them.¹

Economic Depression: Galilee was the bread basket of Israel, but we find that the resort cities of Sephorus and Tiberias, rebuilt by Herod Antipas, exerted an incredible economic hardship on Galilee. The food production of the bread basket of Israel went largely to feeding the aristocratic, bureaucratic and administrative populations of these two capital cities. This resulted in decreasing land ownership

¹ Cited from R.T. France, *Matthew: NICNT*: pg. 143.

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among the Jewish population. More and more Jews lost their land and were forced in tenant or serf labor on the increasingly enlarged farms of wealthy land owners. This resulted in more and more Jews turning to alternative trades and alternative means of income aside from working their farms, such as fishing. [Fishing is only one example]²

We have a people that continue to be oppressed by their Government and distrusted by their religious leaders. It is to those who seem to have been abandoned that Christ comes! It is these that are near the point of hopelessness. It is upon these living in the land of shadows and darkness that Christ comes to shine. This is where Christ's ministry begins in earnest. **"Dawned"** is a brilliant word. It tells us that the light first shined brilliantly here, not that it was shining brightly elsewhere and then moved here.

If the messianic light dawns on the darkest of places, then Messiah's salvation can only be a bestowal of grace – namely, that Jesus came to save the worlds the worst of sinners!

This means that God is not willing to abandon anyone, even those that this world thinks are helpless! Like Baby Jessica, it doesn't matter if you've been thrown down the well by others. It doesn't matter if you fell down the well of your own poor choosing. Christ comes to help those who dwell in darkness. He hears the cry for rescue. He hears the cry for help. And the circumstances of your captivity do not matter. He is willing to go to the darkest regions that have suffered the greatest violence. He is willing to go to the greatest depths to reach the poorest of sinners. The people that the world looks down upon are the people that Christ cherishes.

The Kingdom's Call: The Call of Repentance

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

And what is the manner of salvation that Jesus brings? How does Jesus save this land that dwells in shadows and darkness? How does Jesus bring back from "deep darkness" this land of Galilee? He preaches the message of Repentance! Jesus called the Galileans to an act of repentance. Repent comes from the Greek word, "metanoeo." Noeo has to do with a person's mind, and the prefix "meta" has to do with a movement away from something or a change in position. So repentance is a changing or a moving of one's mind. Repentance consists of a twofold movement: away from the old and toward the new. He is saying "stop, consider, and move you thinking in a new direction."

Repentance is a total change of mind and heart that involves a new lifestyle as well as a new allegiance to God and Christ. Mark 1:15 says, 'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.' The Gospel – the good news – is that the rule of God has arrived in Jesus for the express purpose of saving those who are trapped in the land of shadows and darkness, even deep

² Cited from Eckhard Schnabel's *Early Christian Mission*, Vol. 1: pg. 190.

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darkness. He has come to offer mercy and salvation before the Kingdom comes in its fullness with judgment.

For those of us who find ourselves in a shaft, we have to stop and let God rescue us. But the first thing we need to do is this: STOP! Turn away from ourselves and start looking to God. Jesus brings salvation to Galilee by preaching this simple message, which he heard from John the Baptist: `Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!

All God-honoring Emotions are Broken-Hearted Emotions (Psalm 126)

The root of all God-honoring emotions is broken-heartedness. And what I mean by this is that at that moment when we first began to embrace God into our lives, the first emotion we felt that would have brought Him great pleasure was a broken-hearted emotion of sorrow over our sin that separated us from God.

All of us have lived lives that are not honoring to God. And when we first heard the call of repentance, or that call from God to change our way of thinking, the first ultimate step of that shift in our thinking was a realization of our guilt and condemnation before a holy and righteous God. This first emotion was grounded in an eternal truth that we had not yet grasped. But grasping it for the first time resulted in heart-break. Following this heart break we then experienced the joy of God's gracious salvation. But the start of joy, happiness, or any other God honoring emotion is at the root of broken-hearted repentance.

Application - The Call of the Kingdom is a Pandemic Calling: It is intended to go viral.

Now I want you to observe how exactly it is that Christ intends to save these hopeless undesirables living in the land of Galilee. He calls them to repent. He doesn't make friends with them first. He doesn't have a Kid's Club, or a VBS or any kind of a charity campaign. He calls them to "Repent!"

Are we smarter than Jesus? Do we know better than he does out to rescue people trapped in a deep dark hole? Of course not. We all revere Him. We all respect Him. We worship Him. So why do we think we can bring the Gospel to people in a way better than He did? Why do we think we can outsmart the Messiah and come up with alternative means of bring salvation to people when the clear example of our Lord, the one we all claim to believe in and trust in, was to cry out to a people living in a land that no one wanted, "Change your mind!"

The Kingdom's Call, the Call of Repentance, is a call that started in Judea near Jerusalem by a Baptist named John. But it is a call that is intended to go to the ends of the earth. There is no more buffer state, no more place where we are okay for those individuals to be traded for our safety -for Christ intends to take the Call of the Kingdom, the Call of Repentance to the world!

We see that Jesus did three things in this passage:

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1. He stood with the Baptist when the Baptist issued the call of the Kingdom which was a call to “Repentance!” This means we must stand with those cry out to a desperate world, and we must strengthen their hand in calling out for Repentance!
2. He took that Call and began His own ministry of calling people to Repentance in a region that was too often traded away, used for a buffer state, infused with Gentiles, and open to rank idolatry. Christ is not willing that any part of the earth should be traded away. He does not intend that *any of the world* be used as a buffer state. He is going to take the emergency call of the Kingdom, the Call of Repentance everywhere.
3. He brings hope of salvation to the multitudes with the Call of the Kingdom by preaching “Repent! The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!”

Therefore, we must be willing to take the call of Repentance to the ends of the earth. We must hear the Call of our King and go as far and wide as He will allow us in our daily lives. If we are not willing to go viral with the call of our king, the call of Repentance –*then perhaps we’ve never heard that call ourselves! Perhaps we have yet to truly change our minds!*

You may have heard the phone ringing, you may have seen the caller ID, and you may have sensed that God is calling you into His Kingdom. But you won’t answer, because you dread saying, “Hello.” Hello in this instance is repentance. Many of you in here today may think that you have said “Hello” to God, but you have not.

Saying “hello?” to God requires repentance. How do you know that you’ve actually repented? Because the call of repentance is pandemic. It is a call that, if it is correctly heard and appropriately answered, it is a call that goes viral. Like a video on the internet, it is something that is repeated, retweeted, and forwarded to all your friends. You have not answered the call of repentance if you, yourself, are not forwarding that calling of the Kingdom on to your friends, family, and neighbors.

The call of repentance, if heard correctly, is a viral call. For the call of repentance is a call to join the coming Kingdom! It is a call that is good news! Hear that call today and then become heralds announcing the good news of your King!

Repentance will break us.

On October 17, 1987 shortly before 8:00 PM, the doctors were monitoring baby Jessica’s vital signs. They began to notice that her breathing was becoming shallow and that her heart beat was slowing. Paramedic Robert O’Donnell was down in the hole, trying to pull Jessica out. She was lodged tightly into the well shaft with one leg dangling below and one leg pinned tightly upwards with her foot near her face. EMT O’Donnell had tried everything. He’d used lubricating jell and even forceps to try and pull Jessica free. He’d been gently pulling and tugging at her for nearly two hours, and he still couldn’t seem to budge her.

Finally the call came down. “O’Donnell, we’ve been watching her vital signs and she’s beginning to fade. We’re beginning to lose her. You’ve got to get her out of there!” Frustrated, scared, and choking on rock

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dust O'Donnell half-coughed and half-shouted back into his radio, "I'm trying as hard as I can!" They'd come so far, drilling through twenty-two feet of solid granite and limestone. They'd labored for three days. He'd been pulling for two hours. But she just wouldn't budge. He wasn't sure what else to do without pulling so hard that it might hurt her.

And the doctor radioed back, "O'Donell, I understand. But she must come out right now. You might have to break her, in order to save her." And with those words, O'Donnell knew that time was gone. This little girl was going to die right here in front of his face unless he got her out right now. Throwing caution and the forceps to the wind, he reached into the gap, grabbed the little girl by her wrist and forearm and yanked so violently that he was convinced he had nearly killed her. With a horrible scraping, Jessica McClure grated free against the rough granite and limestone rock.

She came out of that hole at 7:55 PM into the bright glaring rescue lights. She was covered in blood, with large chunks of skin scraped away from her body, and a horrible gash down her face. She may have been broken, but as she squinted into the bright lights for the first time in three days... she was saved!

Repentance is like that. It will break us. God's love is so fierce that He will pull us scraping and grating against the hole into which we have fallen. It will hurt, it will break us, it will at time feels excruciating - *but* it is the loving hands of the Father rescuing us from the pit.

Bridge Baptist Church, we need to repent. It will hurt at times. But if we ever want to get out of the hole that we find ourselves in, then we need to let go of the things that keep us wedged in here so that God can yank us to freedom.

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