**Matthew 4:23-25**

* + By describing Jesus’ power, 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
    - 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

**Matthew 4:23-25**

**23***Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness.*

**24***News about him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed—he healed them all.*

**25***Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns, Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River.*

* This short passage is really an overview of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee
  + From here, Matthew gives us details on these experiences in the chapters ahead
    - For now, let’s focus on three observations
    - First, Matthew says Jesus was traveling throughout Galilee, teaching in synagogues with His first few key disciples
    - 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
    - He probably could have ministered for many more years
  + Mathew says Jesus taught specifically in Galilean synagogues, which were the local Jewish houses of
    - The only official Jewish house of worship that God established for Israel was the tabernacle, later to become the
    - 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 Galilee, He was searching out gatherings of 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 Galilee
    - Jesus’ focus was on converting God-fearing Jews
* 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 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
    - 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
    - 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
  + As Jesus performed these miracles, He was making an undeniable statement of His
    - 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 it to 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

* 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
  + Jesus’ 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 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
    - Jesus healed the body so He would have opportunity to heal the
* 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

**John 9:1-3**

**1***As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth.*

**2***“Rabbi,” his disciples asked him, “why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents’ sins?”*

**3***“It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins,” Jesus answered. “This happened so the power of God could be seen in him.*

* That’s how we need to understand Jesus’ healing ministry in 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
* Finally, the third thing Matthew’s summary shows us is how this strategy was
  + In v.25, Matthew says that large crowds followed Jesus
  + 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 Galilee
  + The word disciple 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 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
  + 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
  + 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 “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**

*Then Paul said, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. As his student, I was carefully trained in our Jewish laws and customs. I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just like all of you today.*

* Jesus was already a renowned rabbi, and He was quickly gaining prominence for His

and

* + When Jesus called men to be His disciples, it was a high honor for them
    - What’s remarkable is these first men Jesus called weren’t even looking to be His disciples or to be disciples of any rabbi
  + 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 an Ivy League today
    - They were receiving a great honor, one they didn’t request, and one that didn’t depend on their academic achievement
  + Now, many people were following Jesus without waiting for Jesus to call them as disciples
    - Later, Matthew will explain that Jesus had thousands of these self-appointed followers
    - These people attached themselves to Jesus without receiving an invitation to be His disciples
* Following Jesus didn’t require a belief in Jesus’ claims as
  + 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
    - Jesus permitted them to join Him in this way, and He even referred 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
  + 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’
    - And inside the group of disciples, there is an even smaller group of handpicked disciples who Jesus called His
  + Here’s the main point to remember…in *each* of these three groups you can find 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 Jesus, but they never placed their faith

Jesus Christ as their Messiah, as their Savior

* + - This group eventually grew 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
  + Sometimes, you’ll find someone who has been in church for years, yet hasn’t come to faith in Jesus Christ
    - Somehow, they hang around believers, yet never encountered Jesus for themselves
    - These are the saddest examples of following without
  + 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 seriously
  + 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
* That’s why teaching the Word of God is so important in this moment, as we gather week to week
  + And it’s why we should do it consistently
    - The only way an unbeliever can hide out in church week after week, year after year, is if their life 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 on the heart, so that person recognizes the truth
    - They see themselves as sinners and in danger of receiving God’s wrath
    - As a result, they repent and accept the grace of God
  + 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
    - Eventually, they become restless and uncomfortable due to the reminders that Jesus is Lord
  + The one thing an unbeliever can’t do is sit still and feel
    - 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
* Studying the Word of God won’t magically erase the evil lurking in our hearts
  + But it does equip us to deal with it
    - First, hearing the Word of God brings a person to a saving faith, which changes the course of their eternal
    - It awakens the 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 He can expose the ugliness that’s inside all of us
    - When 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
* 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 6:64-66**

**64***But some of you do not believe me.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning which ones didn’t believe, and he knew who would betray him.)*

**65***Then he said, “That is why I said that people can’t come to me unless the Father gives them to me.”*

**66***At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him.*

* 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
* 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 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 , 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, 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 selfish reasons
    - And in times of testing, or when their earthly dreams aren’t fulfilled as they expected, they move on
  + When the miracles they were promised fail to materialize, or when the price of following Jesus becomes too great, they 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 6:67-71**

**67***Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, “Are you also going to leave?”*

**68***Simon Peter replied, “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life.* **69***We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God.”*

**70***Then Jesus said, “I chose the twelve of you, but one is a devil.”*

**71***He was speaking of Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, one of the Twelve, who would later 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
  + The point to understand is simply that those who followed Jesus have always included those who were not what they seemed
  + They were disciples in only
  + Yet Jesus allowed them to accompany Him, just as He allows unbelievers to associate within the Church 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

**Hebrews 4:1**

*God’s promise of entering his rest still stands, so we ought to tremble with fear that some of you might fail to experience it.*