

“The Savior Says, ‘Follow Me’”

(Matthew 4:12-23 – Epiphany 3 – January 25, 2026)

Matthew 4:12-23 – ¹²Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. ¹³And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ¹⁵“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: ¹⁶The 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.” ¹⁷From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

¹⁸And 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. ¹⁹Then He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰They immediately left their nets and followed Him. ²¹Going 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, ²²and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. ²³And 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.

Dear Redeemed in Jesus Christ our Savior:

We wouldn’t follow just anyone. If we found ourselves lost somewhere on a dark night, and some shady character in a dark alley said, “Hey, follow me, I’ll show you a shortcut,” we would probably hurry in the opposite direction. But if we came across a familiar and friendly face, and that person held up a bright lantern and said, “Follow me, I can show you the way,” we would be happy to follow and thankful to be led the right way.

We wouldn’t follow just anyone; but we would follow one whom we recognize and trust. Today “**The Savior says, ‘Follow Me.’**” We can trust Jesus and follow Him thankfully, for **1) He has called us out of darkness into the light of His salvation;** and as His disciples, **2) He calls us to share the light of His salvation with others.**

1) He has called us out of darkness into the light of His salvation

Our text tells us that Jesus came to the region of Galilee to dwell in Capernaum. This area is where He would carry on much of His ministry in the next two years. He came here in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-2: “*The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: 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*” (vs. 15-16).

From all outward appearances, the people of Galilee were doing fine before Jesus came. There were wealthy cities there with lots of business. One of the main trade routes passed through, along the Sea of Galilee. But despite its outwardly rich condition, Galilee was filled with spiritual darkness. The people came from a mixture of Jewish and Gentile backgrounds; and their religion was mixed too, accommodating heathen influence. Man-made teachings and traditions beclouded the light of the Scriptures. Many people did not know the true way of salvation. They were caught up in religious formalism, going through the motions of worship, hoping to become righteous before God by their own good works. They did not know the real way to be rid of their sins and get out from under the curse of death. As the Light of the world, Jesus came to this land of spiritual darkness to shine the light of God's gift of salvation for sinners, in the forgiveness and eternal life He came to win.

We may compare the situation in Galilee to the situation around us. Look at the wealth of our land, people living life to the full! But when we look closely, we see spiritual darkness. Religion is mixed up. There are churches across our land, but the truth of God's Word and the Gospel has departed from many. In its place, false prophets preach a different gospel – whether emphasizing legalistic rules for how to live to get right with God; or promoting false liberty in living however you want because God is love; or introducing supposedly new prophecies promising followers riches, wealth, and a more fulfilling life; and so on.... But how often, you don't hear the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins in the crucified and risen Christ. Many people maintain a formal link to Christianity. But if you ask them if they believe they are going to heaven, and if so why, they will give answers like: "I've been a pretty good person. I'm not as bad as some. I think God will accept me." Or "I think God will honor a person's faith whatever it is. Don't we all pray to the same God anyway?"

This is a picture of spiritual darkness. Such a person does not understand that apart from faith in Christ alone and His work of saving sinners, he remains under a curse. He is dying with his sins still on him. He is counting on his own good works to get him right with God. But no amount of sin-tainted works will be good enough to please the holy God, who demands a perfect life (Matthew 5:48). No other faith will save a person except faith in Jesus – the only *"name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12).

Such a person is like that soul lost on a dark night, with a shady character named Satan whispering: "Hey, follow me, I'll show you the way." Ephesians 4:18 describes those who are spiritually lost, following Satan's lies, as: *"having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart."* That would be our condition too, if it were not for Jesus coming to show us the light of His salvation. As Ephesians 2:1-2, 3 reminds us: *"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the*

lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”

This is why, when Jesus came those lost in spiritual darkness, He began to preach: *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (vs. 17). That is to say: “Turn from your sin-darkened path and come into the light of My saving truth. Repent of the ways you have followed your sinful nature with its lusts and desires, in disobedience to God’s Word. Repent of the ways you have made false gods by trusting wealth or pleasures or anything else to give you fulness of life, instead of trusting God alone. Repent of ever thinking your sin-corrupted works were good enough to make you righteous before the holy God.”

With the Savior’s message of repentance also came His Good News of salvation. It goes on to say: *“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people”* (vs. 23). As surely as Jesus’ miracles physically healed and changed the lives of those He touched, so His Gospel of salvation spiritually heals us and changes our lives. Jesus comes to us with the Good News that He has saved us from our sins by giving His life on the cross for us. He paid with His blood for all the ways we have wandered in sin-darkened paths. He offered His perfect life in place of our sin-corrupted life. In Christ, God counts us righteous and does not hold our sins against us. By the grace of God, we are saved from our sinful condition.

Even our repenting and believing is by God’s grace. He gets all the credit for turning us from our sin-darkened path to the light of His salvation. The Savior who found us and said, *“Follow Me”* – by His very Gospel invitation worked a miraculous change in our hearts. For *“The Gospel... is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes”* (Romans 1:16). Jesus worked His miracle of spiritual healing in us by sending the Holy Spirit into our hearts to enlighten us with saving faith (1 Corinthians 12:3). Jesus is that friendly face who came along, to guide us away from Satan’s misleading voice. Jesus held up the bright lantern of His Gospel truth for us saying: *“He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life”* (John 8:12).

2) Jesus calls us to share the light of His salvation with others.

Now Jesus calls us to share the light of His salvation with others. Here we see Jesus as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, calling four fishermen to share His salvation with others. *“Follow Me,”* He said to Peter, Andrew, James, and John; *“and I will make you fishers of men.”* He already had called them to faith before this. Earlier, John the Baptist had pointed his disciples to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:41). From that time, Jesus had begun to gather disciples. After that, these four men had returned to their vocation as fishermen for a time. But now, Jesus called them to full-time service as fishers of men. From now on, He would send them to spread the net of His Gospel, to gather people into His Kingdom for eternal life!

Jesus has called us to faith and discipleship, too. As He leads us by the light of His truth, what a privilege it is for us to share His saving Gospel with those still walking in darkness. 1 Peter 2:9 says: *“You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”*

Jesus does not call everyone to full-time public ministry, as He did these disciples. But He does call us to share His Word with others where He has placed us in our daily vocations – at home, at work, at school, in our neighborhood. We can share the light of His salvation with people walking in spiritual darkness, wherever we are, at any time!

If we feel unqualified, due to lack of Bible knowledge or some personal inability, remember, those first disciples Jesus called didn’t have any apparent qualifications, either. They were unschooled fishermen. But Jesus would continue to train them and give them the tools needed. He would put in their hands the net of His Gospel and opportunities to use it.

So it is with us. As disciples who follow Jesus daily, hearing His Word, taking it to heart, applying it in our lives, He is equipping us to share our faith. As Jesus went among people lost in spiritual darkness, He will lead us to those who need the light of salvation we can share. He says: *“You are the light of the world.... Let your light so shine before men”* (Matthew 5:14-16).

Think again of that picture of someone lost on a dark night, confused and afraid. A shady character in a dark alley is saying, “Hey, follow me.” But now, see yourself as the familiar and friendly face, coming to that lost person, holding up the bright lantern of Jesus’ Gospel. Through our witness, the Savior invites them: *“Follow Me. I will show you the way. I am here to save you.”* We can share the Good News with the lost soul, that God loves them so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross for their sins and save them for eternal life.

So we pray in the words of the hymn (*“Rise, Thou Light of Gentile Nations”*):

Savior, shine in all Thy glory
 On the nations near and far;
 From the highways and the byways
 Call them, O Thou Morning Star.
 Guide them whom Thy grace hath chosen
 Out of Satan’s dreadful thrall
 To the mansions of Thy Father –
 There is room for sinners all.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.