

Matthew
Jesus' Galilean Ministry
Matthew 4:23-25
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Well, we come again to our study of Matthew's Gospel, and I want to back up and make sure that you don't miss the forest for the trees. So let me start by reminding you of the theme of this great Gospel. Matthew wrote his Gospel to prove that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah of the Hebrew Scripture, the divine Savior and King. That's the point of this Gospel.

So far as he has unfolded that theme, we have seen "The Messiah's Arrival" in chapters 1 and 2. We've seen "His Preparation" in chapter 3 through the middle of chapter 4. And we find ourselves discovering "The Messiah's Ministry." It begins in chapter 4, verse 17, and runs all the way through chapter 16, verse 20. We started with verse 17 of chapter 4, looking at "A Summary of His Ministry," His teaching ministry, and then we started to look at this last section in chapter 4, which is the start of "Jesus' Galilean Ministry," the start of His Galilean ministry. Last time, we saw "The Selection of Four of His Disciples," Andrew and Peter, James and John. Today, we come to verses 23 to 25, the end of chapter 4, and we come to "A Summary of His Public Ministry" in Galilee. Let's read it together. Matthew, chapter 4, verses 23 to 25. You follow along in your copy of God's Word.

Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and *the* Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and *from* beyond the Jordan.

In these verses, Matthew provides us with a sweeping summary of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee that lasted over one-and-a-half-years of His ministry. The verses we just read together are fascinating to me in two ways. First of all, because Matthew essentially summarizes almost two years of Jesus' public ministry in these verses because back in chapter 4, verse 17, Jesus began His ministry, likely in the fall of the year 26 A.D., and when we come to chapter 5, verse 1, in “The Sermon on the Mount,” it's two years after that. It's the fall of 28 A.D. when He preached this famous sermon, “The Sermon on the Mount.” So, these three verses sort of encapsulate, for us, those years of ministry.

But also in these three verses, Matthew does something else. He introduces us to the next two major sections of his Gospel. As we study verses 23 to 25 together, we're going to see two primary aspects of Jesus' public ministry. First of all, he's going to talk about His teaching and preaching ministry. Well, guess what comes next? Chapters 5 through 7 is a powerful, wonderful example of Jesus' teaching ministry, “The Sermon on the Mount.” Also, in these verses we'll study today, he introduces us to Jesus' healing ministry. Well, in chapters 8 and 9, Matthew is going to give us a number of very specific examples of that part of Jesus' public ministry. So, this really is a kind of introduction, a summary and an introduction to what's coming.

In verses 23 to 25, Matthew describes for us, and I want us to see together, “Four Features of Jesus' Great Galilean Ministry,” four features, and I trust before we're done today, you'll see how this also intersects with our lives as believers as we watch our Lord's ministry. So, let's look at them together. The first feature that we come to in terms of his Galilean ministry is “Its Provincial Focus,” its provincial focus. Jesus chooses to focus His attention for many months on one small region of one small country in one nation in the land of Israel. Now, notice what verse

23 says, “Jesus was going throughout all Galilee.” The tense of the verb ‘was going’ in the original language is a tense which implies an ‘ongoing reality.’ He kept on going throughout all Galilee. He did this, as I said, for almost eighteen months. He was traveling through the area of Galilee. Theologians call this “Jesus' Great Galilean Ministry,” and it's summarized here. That, by the way, is why, at the end of this section, Matthew repeats this summary, in verse 23, almost verbatim. Flip over to chapter 9; chapter 9, verse 35, when he's ending it, he says this, “Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.” So those bookend this section that describes Jesus' ministry in Galilee, the heart of Jesus' ministry in Galilee.

Now, notice it says He “was going throughout all Galilee.” On the face of it, that could sound more impressive than it really is, because ‘all Galilee’ is actually very small. It's just forty miles wide by seventy miles long. But Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that there were some two-hundred cities, towns, and villages in Galilee, and a number of those with fifteen-thousand people or more. There were at least three-hundred-thousand people in Galilee in the first century, and Josephus estimated there may have been as many as three-million, so somewhere in that range. There were a lot of towns. If Jesus visited two or three towns a day, it would take more than three months to visit all of them without a single day off. And this is where Jesus chose to focus. Now if you're thinking, and I hope you are, it really invites an important question, why? Why did Jesus choose, for eighteen months of His earthly ministry, to spend it in Galilee in small towns and small villages? Why this provincial area? Well, there are a couple of answers to that. One of them is because Jesus' ministry in Galilee actually authenticated His credentials as the Messiah, because writing seven-hundred years earlier, Isaiah had prophesied

that the Messiah would minister in this very area, Isaiah chapter 9. Also, Jesus' ministry in Galilee anticipated His future worldwide mission, since Galilee was called “Galilee of the Gentiles” and was populated by mostly Jews, but also those of many other ethnicities and nationalities. So don't miss the fact that Jesus chose to concentrate for eighteen months on this one small area on this planet.

Now Matthew highlights a second feature of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. Let's call it “Its Pastoral Priorities.” Notice verse 23 again, “Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.” Matthew captures Jesus' public ministry in three great ministry priorities. Let's look at them together.

First of all, he was “Teaching in Their Synagogues.” Verse 23 says, “Teaching in their (That is, the Jewish.) synagogues.” Now that makes sense, because Jesus himself will say in chapter 15, verse 24, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” That doesn't mean He never ministered to others; it means that His primary mission and purpose was to His own people. And so that's why He goes to their synagogues, the Jewish synagogues. Most scholars agree that synagogues, as we know them, began in the sixth century B.C., the five-hundred years before Jesus, during the time of the Babylonian captivity. Why? Because they couldn't get to the Temple anymore. And so, they began to establish these local places of worship. To form a synagogue, you no longer needed all the Jewish people. You just needed a quorum of ten adult Jewish men. Because of that, most towns and even villages had synagogues. The word ‘synagogue’ simply means ‘a place of assembly.’ Jesus, as we're seeing here, spoke on the Sabbath in all the synagogues throughout the two-hundred-plus towns and villages in Galilee.

Now it wasn't unusual for a visiting rabbi to be asked to teach on the Sabbath, particularly one as famous and well known as Jesus was. These are, again, small towns, villages, and in these synagogues, word would have spread about this Rabbi, this Teacher. And so, He taught. And this is also important for you to understand. What did Jesus teach in the synagogue? When Jesus gathered every Sabbath Day of His ministry to read the Scripture and to teach, Jesus was an expository preacher. We know that's what happened in the synagogues in the first century. A portion of the Law was read and then a portion from the Prophets was read. And then a teacher, in Jesus' case, every Sabbath, He's the teacher. What is He doing? He is expositing. He's explaining that portion that was read. So, when you read the Gospels, you read all of these sermons from midweek. But don't think that was really the thrust of Jesus' teaching ministry. The fact is, the thrust of His teaching ministry was every week in a synagogue, reading the next passage and explaining that passage, exactly what's supposed to happen in every church; that's what Jesus did.

Now Mark provides us the background for exactly how and why Jesus chose to do this Galilean tour. Turn there with me, Mark, chapter 1. Here we learn why and how this unfolded. Verse 16 of Mark 1 is the parallel passage to the one we studied last in Matthew. It's where Jesus finds these four men, two sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew, James and John; He calls them to go with Him on this short-term ministry trip. But initially, they serve with Him in Capernaum. Verse 20 says, He called them, they left everything, and what did they do next? Verse 21, "They went into Capernaum and immediately on the Sabbath, He entered the synagogue" there—His hometown, now His new chosen hometown and ministry headquarters. He goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath, "and begins to teach." Verse 22, "They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes." In the context of that

Sabbath gathering, He cast out a demon, verse 23 and following. We'll learn more about that as we go through Matthew's Gospel. And so, "the news spreads (obviously, verse 28) about Him everywhere and all the surrounding district of Galilee." But that day, that Sabbath day, verse 29, "And immediately after they came out of the synagogue," they went back to Peter's house there nearby and found Peter's mother-in-law sick, and Jesus healed her. That brings us to the end of that Sabbath day, verse 32, "When evening came, after the sun had set, they *began* bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city gathered at the door." So, there's this massive gathering on Saturday night after the sun went down and the Sabbath was over, and Jesus healed them all.

Verse 35, "In the early morning (Now we're Sunday morning—the day after the Sabbath.), while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the *house*, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there." So, He leaves Peter's, goes outside Capernaum, goes out into the countryside and was praying. "Simon and his companions searched for Him; and they found Him, and (they) said to Him, 'Everyone is looking for You.'" You see what's going on? That Saturday night, the whole town gathers at Peter's house, He's healing everybody and it's exciting. And the next morning, they all show up again and Peter is so excited. It's like, "Lord, it's happening. This is it! This is what you wanted. Look at the crowds gathering!

Look at Jesus' response. Verse 38, "He said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to towns nearby, so that I may preach there also, for that is what I came for." Jesus said, "Let's go somewhere else." And the tense of the verb implies a longer trip. It implies weeks or even months to the towns nearby. The Greek word translated 'towns' literally means 'the village cities.' Capernaum was the largest town in this area. Mark calls it a '*polis*,' a 'city.' But Jesus wanted to leave the city of Capernaum, with its population of ten-to-fifteen-thousand, to go to

the smaller towns, and yet towns that were large enough to have synagogues, which required ten adult men. So, Jesus said to His four disciples at this point, “Okay, let's go throughout Galilee so that I can teach the Scripture there also.” And that's exactly what He did. Look at verse 39, “And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.”

By the way, this was Jesus' consistent practice throughout His earthly ministry. In John 18, verse 20, Jesus is before Pilate at the end of His ministry. And what does He say to Pilate there? He says, “I always taught in synagogues where all the Jews come together.” Luke, chapter 4, verse 15 says, a parallel passage to the one here in Mark 1:39 says, “He *began* teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all,” all around Galilee. In Luke, chapter 4, verse 16, He returns to his hometown in Nazareth and that's what He does there. He takes the scroll, reads from Isaiah, and then He sits down to teach, to exposit that text. After the people of Nazareth rejected Him, Jesus continued teaching and preaching in the synagogues. Luke 4:31, “He came down to Capernaum...and He was teaching them on the Sabbath.” Luke 4:44, “He kept on preaching in the synagogues.” So that was the focus of Jesus' ministry. Again, we read in the Gospels about many sermons He preached during the week, but that wasn't the focus of His ministry. The focus of His ministry was week after week, Sabbath after Sabbath, reading the next text and explaining it to the people. It's interesting, however, that Matthew doesn't record a single example of Jesus teaching in a synagogue. And in fact, the longest example we have of that is the one in Luke 4, when he teaches in Nazareth, His old hometown. But that was a huge focus of His ministry.

But notice His second pastoral priority. It was “Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom.” Back in our text, Matthew 4:23, “Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.” The Greek word for ‘proclaiming’ is ‘*karussō*.’ It's

a word we met back in verse 17. It means ‘to herald,’ ‘to proclaim like a king's herald.’ Jesus was “heralding” or “proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.” You say, “What is ‘the gospel of the kingdom?’” Go back to verse 17, “From that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” He said, “The kingdom is here!” Here's what Jesus said, and we looked at this in detail; if you weren't here, you can go back and listen to the message on verse 17. But Jesus says this, “Here's the good news. You can get into My spiritual kingdom today, and be one over whom I rule, and you can get into My eternal kingdom forever. You can get into the kingdom of God” (Paraphrase). How? Verse 17 says, “Repent.” You have to turn from your rebellion; you have to be willing to turn from your sinful life to Jesus.” And Jesus adds in Mark 1, “You have to believe the gospel,” Mark 1:14-15, you have to “Repent and believe in the gospel” (the good news about Jesus' perfect life, His substitutionary death, and His resurrection.).

Now the text here, verse 23, raises an interesting question; and it's one that many have, and that is, “What is the difference between teaching and preaching?” Both of them are here in this verse. What are we talking about? Well, there is a lot of confusion about this, but the truth is, these two Greek terms are often used synonymously. Let me prove that to you. First of all, “What one Gospel labels as ‘preaching,’ in the very same context, another Gospel labels as ‘teaching.’” For example, in Matthew 4, verse 23, it says, He was “teaching in their synagogues.” But the parallel passage we just saw in Mark 1:39 says, “He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching.” So, in parallel passages, one or the other word is used. Secondly, “Even within the same Gospel, the same activity can be called ‘teaching’ and ‘preaching.’ I've given you a couple of examples there, one in Mark's Gospel and one in Luke's Gospel (Mark 1:21; Luke 4:15; Mark 1:38; Luke 4:44). Thirdly, at times, “The two words are

used synonymously in the very same verse (Matt. 11:1; Luke 20:1; Acts 5:42; 15:35; 28:31; Rom. 2:21; 2 Timothy 4:2). For example, turn over to Acts 15; Acts 15, verse 35, talking about Paul and Barnabas' ministry in the church in Antioch, it says, "Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also the word of the Lord." So, they're used in the same verse, essentially synonymously.

A fourth argument I would give you is, "The responsibility of New Testament elders is both teaching and preaching." You see, we are described, elders are described primarily as teachers who systematically instruct in the content of Scripture. That's why in Ephesians 4:11, we're called "pastors (What?) and teachers." We're "shepherding teachers." And 1 Timothy 3:2 says elders have to be "able to teach." But in the discharge of our teaching ministry, elders are also commanded to be preachers of the Word. 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the word." But it's interesting in that very text, it goes on to say, "preach the word" with all teaching. So, the two terms are really very closely related.

However, when they're used together as they are in our text, each one is likely intended to contribute its own nuance. So, what are the nuances? Let me give you a summary. When you see these words, think of it like this. "Teaching is the systematic instruction in God's Word." "Preaching is the attitude, disposition, or manner of the messenger: he is to speak, to announce, to teach as a herald, speaking with authority." That's why Paul says to Titus, his young son in the faith, in Titus 2:15, "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority." And then he says, "Let no one disregard you." The Greek word is "let no one think their way around you." In other words, "Declare what you declare from God's Word with authority." Listen, preaching is not a conversation; it's not a discussion; it's not a coffee room chat—it's a declaration; it's a proclamation; it's an announcement from God. Peter, in 1 Peter 4:11 says,

“Whoever speaks (whoever has a speaking gift), *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God.”

Jesus was obviously clearly committed to teaching. We're about to study Matthew 5-7, “The Sermon on the Mount.” But notice how that ends; go back to Matthew and look at chapter 7, the end of “The Sermon on the Mount,” and verse 28, “When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at (What?) His teaching.” And yet, notice verse 29, the reason they were amazed is that “He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes.” So, Jesus was committed to teaching, but He taught as a herald with all authority.

Now, that brings us to His third “Pastoral Priority.” Not only “Teaching in Their Synagogues,” “Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom,” but thirdly, “Healing Every Kind of Disease and Sickness (Illness).” D.A. Carson writes, helpfully I think, that “In the New Testament, sickness may on occasion result directly from a particular sin.” For example, 1 Corinthians 11 (Right?), those who were in Corinth disrespecting the Lord's Table, it says, “some of you are sick and some of you have died” (Paraphrase). So, on occasion, sickness can be connected to a particular sin. However, Carson goes on to say this, “Sickness always results directly or indirectly from living in a fallen world.” That's why we get sick, that's why we have the things happening in our bodies we do, we live in a fallen world, and that's why Jesus addresses it.

Look at verse 23. It says, “(He) Jesus was going throughout all Galilee...healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.” Now the Greek word for ‘people’ there is a unique word that is almost always used for the people of Israel. So initially, Jesus' healing ministry was focused on the Jewish people that He encountered in the synagogues, in the towns, in the villages of Galilee. We'll see in a moment, it spreads beyond that, but that was His initial

focus. Now look at the word 'disease.' That word refers to 'a serious or chronic illness or disease,' think cancer, other kinds of serious or chronic diseases. The word 'sickness' likely refers to the more routine sicknesses that we encounter in a fallen world, things like fevers and infections and flus and viruses. And Matthew tells us Jesus was healing both. Don't you love the fact that Jesus wasn't a specialist? Don't get me wrong, I'm thankful for specialists, but He wasn't a specialist—He healed them all. In fact, in the Gospels, we find Jesus healing those with a fever, leprosy, paralysis, withered limbs, hemorrhages, deafness, inability to speak, blindness, and raising the dead. That means that Jesus healed diseases, viruses, congenital disabilities, and oh, by the way, He overcame death as well! Now, even as I read that list, let me just say, "Did you notice that Jesus' miracles were completely unlike the purported charismatic miracles today?" Think about it, Jesus healed everyone who came to Him and asked, and He never blamed the person for their lack of faith because they weren't healed.

Secondly, Jesus healed everything. He healed various diseases and sicknesses, every imaginable organic and congenital disability, and even raised the dead to life. But think about the characteristics of Jesus' healing. Jesus healed instantaneously. He healed completely; there were no partial healings with Jesus. He healed undeniably. It wasn't like, "Well, yeah, my—you know, I heard from someone who heard from someone that some miracle happened somewhere in, you know, in a developing country." No, these were undeniable so that even Jesus' enemies had to admit that miracles had been done. And He healed permanently. You didn't trace them down two days later and find that they had somehow been made better by some sort of psychosomatic influence, and now they're bad again. You never found that with Jesus' healings. B.B. Warfield writes, "The number of the miracles which Jesus wrought may easily be underrated. It's been said that, in effect, He banished disease and death from Palestine for the three years of His

ministry.” Now, obviously, that's a bit of an overstatement because there were plenty who didn't trust in Him, who didn't come to Him, but it's not an overstatement in the sense that I don't think we can imagine what Jesus did in healing miracles during those years.

But that raises the question, “Why? Why was this an important priority in Jesus' ministry?”

There are, biblically speaking, “Four Primary Reasons That Jesus Healed,” and you need to know them, and you need to understand them. Number one, Jesus healed “To prove His divine identity.” Jesus said this Himself. Turn over to John, chapter 5; John, chapter 5, verse 36, Jesus says, “The testimony which I have is greater than *the testimony* of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish—the very works that I do—testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me.” But it's more than that. Turn over to John 10; John 10, verse 24, “The Jews then gathered around Him (Jesus), and were saying to Him, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you're the Christ (Messiah), tell us plainly.’” John 10:25, “Jesus answered them, ‘I told you and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me.’” Again, what do they testify? Well, go down to verse 37 and 38, “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that (Here's what His miracles attested.) the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.” He was claiming to be God, and they got it. Look at the next verse (39), “They were seeking again to seize Him,” because they thought He was blaspheming, claiming to be God. So, his miracles proved His divine identity.

Secondly, “His miracles were to establish His credibility as a divine messenger of revelation.”

Acts, chapter 2, verse 22, Peter on the day of Pentecost says this, He says, “Jesus the Nazarene, (Listen to this.) a man attested to you by God.” How did God attest to Jesus? “With miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him.” Like all of those who were given

the power to work miracles, part of the reason for Jesus' miracles was to affirm His credibility as a Messenger for God.

Number three, “His healing miracles were to prove He was the promised Messiah.” Turn back to Matthew, chapter 11. This is exactly what Jesus says; Matthew 11, and verse 2, John is in prison, John the Baptist. He hears about what Jesus is doing, and he sends word, he's confused because Jesus, as the Messiah, isn't doing what he expected the Messiah to do. And so, he says in verse 3:

“Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?” Jesus answered and said to them (these representatives of John) “Go and report to John what you hear and see: *the* BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and *the* LAME WALK, *the* LEPERS ARE CLEANSED and *the* deaf hear, *the* dead are raised up, and *the* POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.” (In other words, He's saying, “Look, go tell John that the prophecy of Isaiah; Isaiah 35, verse 5 and following, is being fulfilled in me. That's prophecy about the Messiah, these works prove I am the Messiah.”)

Now, when you look at those first three reasons for Jesus' healing miracles, you can see that to believe in Jesus and to deny His miracles is impossible—you can't do both. I had, in my library for many years, the Bible, the New Testament Gospels of Thomas Jefferson in which he excised all the miracles of Jesus. Listen, you can't embrace Jesus as a good teacher and deny His miracles, because in doing so, you are impeaching His character, but more than that, you are calling Him a liar because His miracles attested to His claims.

There's a fourth reason for His healing ministry and that was, and I love this, “To demonstrate God's heart of compassion.” There are many places you can see this, but I love Luke 7, verse 13.

It says, “When the Lord saw her (This woman, it was a woman whose only son had died. She was a widow whose only son had died; and when He saw her.), He felt compassion for her and said to her, ‘Do not weep,’” and of course goes on to raise her son from the dead. That's the heart of Jesus. And John 14:9 says, “He who has seen Me (Jesus says.) has seen the Father.” You see, when we see the compassion of Jesus for those who are hurting during His earthly ministry, we see the heart of God. I love that.

Now, some of you are from charismatic backgrounds, so let me say this. It's really important to understand this. God doesn't always choose to heal all of the diseases of His people, ever, and certainly that's true today. I mean, think about it logically. If that was God's will, then no Christian would ever die. Eventually something gets you and the mortality rate is 100%, so it's not His will to heal us of all of our diseases all the time. But the fact that Jesus healed everyone who came to Him for healing during His ministry proves three wonderful truths that you need to embrace. Number one, that God is the only one who heals. Deuteronomy 32:39, that's kind of become my theme verse since my incident a year ago when I should have died. “There is no God besides Me (God says.); I have wounded and it is I who heal.” Every time, friend, that you have recovered from the smallest scratch to the most serious physical injury, from the mildest cold to a disease that threatened your life, every time you have recovered, it is God alone who has healed you. Oh, He can use means. It's okay to be thankful for the means, but don't ever steal His glory by thinking that it's anything other than Him.

A second truth that we learn from Jesus' healing ministry, and that is that God has the power to heal, and He has the power to heal anyone of anything. That really is faith. You know, faith isn't believing God's going to heal me because God hasn't promised anywhere to heal you. But faith is believing that God can heal me if that's what He wants to do because that's our God. And that

compels us always to ask for healing, but never to demand it. Again, some of you have been taught that it's like a lack of faith to pray what Jesus prayed. Exactly how can that be? Jesus said, pray like this, not My will but “Your will be done.” So, when you come to God asking for healing, you need to pray that as well. You don't demand of God.

Third truth, God has compassion for everyone affected by living in a fallen world. I love that's true about our God. I don't know what you're going through right now. Maybe you have some little physical issue you're dealing with, some trouble. Maybe you have something huge, devastating. You've had your own personal earthquake. You've gotten news that something's going on in your body. You need to know that our God cares. He has a heart of compassion. Psalm 103, verse 8 says, “The Lord is compassionate.” And if you doubt that, read the Gospels, look at Jesus, because Jesus said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” He cares, whatever you're suffering. So, the pastoral priorities of Jesus' ministry were “Teaching in Their Synagogues,” “Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom,” and “Healing Every Kind of Disease and Sickness.”

Now, Matthew highlights a third feature of Jesus' Galilean ministry, and that is “Its International Impact.” Back in our text, verse 24, “The news (or literally in Greek, ‘the hearing,’ ‘the report’) about Him spread.” As Jesus travels throughout Galilee, word about Him spreads to the surrounding areas. Remember, there was an international highway that ran from Egypt to Mesopotamia, through Galilee, and directly through Capernaum, Jesus' ministry headquarters. And so, word about Him spread rapidly. As a result, people came from throughout the rest of Israel, and even from other nations, and they came, in some cases, to listen to Jesus' teaching, and in other cases, notice verse 24, “they brought to Him all who were ill,” literally “all who were having badly.” That is, those who had it bad, physically. They brought those, he goes on to

say, who were suffering with various diseases and pains, meaning those tormented by severe pain.

And then Matthew lists three common conditions that Jesus healed. First of all, “demoniacs,” literally “those who were demonized.” We’ll learn more about this as we get to His miracles in chapters 8 and 9. But demoniacs were unbelievers who were dominated and controlled by either one demon or multiple demons. A demon had taken up residence within them and exercised sovereignty over their body and their lives. He healed them. Second category, “epileptics.” In Greek, the word is literally “those who are moonstruck.” It refers to those who have epileptic seizures, because in the ancient world, they believed that seizures were worse at certain stages of the moon. They thought not only did it affect the tides, the moon, but also affected things within our bodies, including seizures. So, He healed epileptics. And “paralytics;” this Greek word is the word we get our word in English ‘paralyzed’ from. It’s a person for whom a portion or all of his body is paralyzed. Later, Matthew’s going to give examples of Jesus healing all of these when we get into his Gospel. But notice Matthew here simply says of those in all those conditions, verse 24, “He healed them.” Whatever their background, their ethnicity, their nation, whatever their physical issue, He healed them all.

And notice these people came from everywhere. They came from every direction of the compass. Look at verse 24, “The news about Him spread throughout all Syria.” On the map, you see on the screen, that’s the area in orange; it’s the land north and northeast of Galilee. Verse 25 says, “Large crowds followed Him from Galilee.” That’s the yellow portion of the map on top. “and *the* Decapolis;” that’s the purple area of the map. That was a confederation of ten Greek cities, mostly east of the Jordan River. “And Jerusalem and Judea;” that’s the green area on the map. “And from beyond the Jordan;” that’s the yellow area on the bottom. It’s referring to Perea

on the northeast corner of the Dead Sea. Look at the map; it means from everywhere in that part of the world, Jews and Gentiles from all the surrounding areas, both within Israel and in nearby nations; they all came to hear Jesus teach or to have Him heal them or their loved ones. And He did.

Now as I thought about this, I was reminded, obviously, that none of us has the miraculous power to heal. I wish I did; I'm in hospitals all the time. I wish I had the power to walk into a room and heal that person that knows Christ and is suffering. I don't. Neither do you. However, we can still do what Jesus did in this sense. Listen to how Peter describes it to Cornelius in Acts, chapter 10, verse 38. He said, "Jesus of Nazareth went about doing good." You can't heal, but you can do that. That's what He did. So Christian, let me just ask you, you're a follower of Jesus Christ, "Is it the ambition of your life to go around at work and at school and in your neighborhood and in the daily activities of life doing good, as much as lies within your power, to do it to others?" That's what Jesus did.

There's a fourth feature of Jesus' ministry, very briefly, that Matthew mentions in verse 25, and "It's Phenomenal Growth," it's phenomenal growth. Notice verse 25 begins, "Large crowds followed Him." Huge crowds of both Jews and Gentiles from all of the surrounding areas followed Him. Now don't misunderstand; not all of those in these large crowds followed Jesus in the sense of as His disciples. Most of them were not antagonistic; I mean, some were, there were Pharisees mixed into these crowds, but most of them were not antagonistic. However, clearly most of them were not His true followers, as becomes clear as you read the Gospels. So, at this point in Jesus' ministry, these large crowds created a real potential for great spiritual confusion. Who are His true subjects? In fact, notice back in chapter 5, verse 1, it says, "When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and after He sat down," and Luke(?)

Matthew tells us, He taught His disciples. So, He sees the crowds, He calls His disciples, and He teaches them. Why?

You see, the large crowds mingled together with His true disciples; that's what compelled Jesus to preach the sermon we call "The Sermon on the Mount." In "The Sermon on the Mount," Jesus provides a very clear understanding of who are truly His disciples and who are not. He separates the sheep and the goats. Jesus preached this sermon we call "The Sermon on the Mount," really for two reasons. First of all, because He didn't want everyone in these huge crowds following Him to think they were truly His subjects. In fact, in chapter 5, verse 20, He reminds the crowds that "their own righteousness" will never get them into the kingdom. He ends this sermon with warnings in chapter 7, where He warns about finding the wrong way, the wrong entrance into salvation. He warns about false teachers who will direct you to the wrong entrance. And then He warns about a false profession in which you say, "Lord, Lord," but you don't truly follow Him. You see, it's one thing to say Jesus is Lord, it's another to obey Him as Lord. It's one thing to friend Jesus, it's another to follow Him. It's one thing to follow Jesus like you follow people on social media, it's another to follow Him as teacher and master. Jesus had to cut through the confusion that always comes with the crowds. Whenever Jesus is culturally popular, like He is in North Texas, we need "The Sermon on the Mount." As we will see, false believers, those who think they're believers but aren't, they often pursue Jesus for merely temporal blessings. In their case, Jesus is merely the means to the end of physical healing, wealth, prosperity in this life. On the other hand, true believers always want, more than they want anything else, Jesus Himself, and the forgiveness and the eternal life that comes with Him. But there's a second reason Jesus preached the Sermon, not just to identify those who weren't truly His, but even more than that; "The Sermon on the Mount" is aimed at His true disciples.

It's aimed at those who really believed in Him. In fact, He begins "The Sermon on the Mount" with the beatitudes in which He describes what real Christians, what real citizens of His spiritual kingdom look like because He wants us to know. Notice how He begins, chapter 5, verse 3, "Blessed are the poor (beggars) in spirit (And I love this.), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It's yours; you already belong if you came to God like a spiritual beggar, throwing yourself on His mercy in Jesus Christ, like the man in Jesus' story who beat on his chest, crying out, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner," you're in, you're His, you're in His kingdom. He wanted you, Christian, to know two things. That's why he preached the Sermon. One, and we'll see this as it unfolds, that you are really His disciple. He wanted you to know that, to have the confidence of that. And secondly, He wanted you to know what one, who is truly His, should live their life like. That's what we're going to learn in "The Sermon on the Mount."

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for this powerful passage. Thank You for our Lord Jesus. Thank You for His compassion, for His clarity with the truth. Lord, thank You for all we're learning about Him and from Him. Give us open hearts. Lord, for those who are here who don't know Him, who are really false believers, who claim to know Him, but they're just part of the crowd, attached to Jesus, help them to see that; bring them to truly know You through Your Son.

But Father, for the many here who do know You through Jesus, Lord, may this sermon, as it unfolds before us in the weeks ahead, may it show them they truly are His. And may it show us all how we are then to live. Thank You for Your Word; use it in our hearts, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.