

## Matthew 4:23-25

### Review

Matthew begins: “The book of the generations of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” In other words, “The story of Jesus – the fulfillment of all God’s promises. We remember that at least one reason Matthew wrote his gospel was in order to assure the Jewish Christians that their new faith was in perfect harmony (continuity) with their Jewish heritage and the faith of their ancestors (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David). The Jewish Christians were being accused of being traitors to their Jewish heritage because of their faith in Jesus and their membership in the church. But “No!” Matthew says. “It is only through faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah and therefore as a member of the Messiah’s church that you will ever truly experience the fulfillment of all of God’s promises to Israel.” And so Matthew begins his gospel by tracing the genealogy of Jesus back to David and Abraham in three sets of fourteen generations each. In this way, he emphasizes that the Messiah has come in the fullness of time. The long days of preparation have been completed.

Then Matthew gives five beautiful examples of how Scripture, in many different ways, has been fulfilled in Jesus.

1. In accordance with the word of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, Jesus was *born of a virgin* and so He is *from the Holy Spirit*. Jesus is God – with us (1:18-25).
2. As the prophet Micah foretold, Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the land of Judah, and so He would be the ruler who (unlike Herod) would *shepherd* God’s people Israel (2:1-12).
3. In order to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet Hosea, Jesus came out of Egypt as the one who would bring about a second exodus for His people and deliver them from slavery to sin and death (2:13-15).
4. ~ When Bethlehem wept and lamented under the cruel oppression of Herod, it was a fulfillment of what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah.  
~ And so it ultimately pointed to the fact that Jesus would fulfill God’s promises of deliverance from all oppression, and suffering, and weeping, and tears (2:16-18).
5. Finally, Jesus grew up in a no-account, backwoods village called Nazareth. This was in keeping with the OT prophecy’s that the Messiah would accomplish our salvation only as one despised and rejected by men (2:19-23).

So we see that it all *fits*. Indeed, we can only rightly understand the Old Testament in the light of Jesus.

When John the Baptist came preaching *in the wilderness* (3:1-12), it was another sign of the arrival of God’s salvation in the promised kingdom of the Messiah. Many Jews came to John to repent and be baptized in order that they might join the remnant of True Israel and flee from the wrath to come. It was this repentant and believing remnant of Jews who would soon be welcomed into the Messianic kingdom, being baptized by the Messiah with the Holy Spirit and fire. The apocalyptic age of the kingdom was at hand! But then the very one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire, the one whose sandals John was not even worthy to carry, this very one came to John to be baptized *by him*. And so Jesus fulfilled the righteous requirement of His Father (revealed in the prophets) by submitting to the baptism of sinners and being numbered with the transgressors (3:13-17). But though He was numbered with the transgressors, Jesus

Himself never sinned. Just like Israel, Jesus was led out into the wilderness, and just like Israel Jesus was tested by God (tempted by the devil; 4:1-11). But in every place that Israel failed, Jesus succeeded (as the true Israel). Where we were defeated, Jesus was triumphant. Where we sinned, Jesus obeyed. He passed the test *for us*, and *in our place*. After this, Jesus went and lived in Capernaum, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali (4:12-17). And so the Scripture was fulfilled which said that the people who *chose* darkness rather than light and then *blamed God* for the terrible results of their own choice... these very people would see a great light. God, in His free and sovereign grace, would cause the light to dawn upon His rebellious people. And then Matthew tells the story of four fishermen (Simon and Andrew, and James and John) who respond to Jesus' call on the shore of the Sea of Galilee by *immediately leaving everything* to follow after Jesus (4:18-22). In light of all that we've seen of Jesus, Matthew's point here is clearly that this must also be *our only* rightful response to the call of Jesus upon our lives. This brings us now to Matthew 4:23-25.

## **Introduction**

Remember now that Matthew has “creatively” outlined his Gospel using geography. After the first several chapters of introducing the Messiah, Matthew spends about thirteen chapters focusing all of his attention on the ministry of Jesus in Galilee (never mentioning any of Jesus' trips to Judea). After this, we'll see Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem of Judea, then His time in Jerusalem, and finally, His return to Galilee (with no mention of Jesus' ascension into heaven from a mountain just outside of Jerusalem). Remember, too, that in composing his Gospel, Matthew goes back and forth between large sections of Jesus' *teaching* (five major discourses) and large narrative sections describing Jesus' *deeds*. In light of these two “strategies” that Matthew has used for outlining his Gospel (geography and alternating sections of Jesus' words and Jesus deeds), let's read Matthew 4:23-25.

Matthew 4:23-25 – And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

### **I. Words and Deeds, Deeds and Words (verse 23)**

The first thing we notice is that we're in the “Galilee” section of Matthew – we're still right at the very beginning. And here at the beginning, Matthew gives us a summary of what Jesus was doing in Galilee: He was teaching and preaching (words), and He was healing (deeds)! And so after this opening summary, Matthew will go on to give an example of the essence of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (5-7; *words*) followed by two chapters that describe His miracles of healing (8-9; *deeds*). At the end of these chapters, Matthew concludes with the same summary he began with here in chapter four.

- ✓ Matthew 4:23 – And he went throughout all Galilee, ***teaching*** in their synagogues and ***proclaiming*** the gospel of the kingdom and ***HEALING*** every disease and every affliction among the people.
  - ~ Chapters 5-7: ***Teaching/Proclaiming*** (words)
  - ~ Chapters 8-9: ***HEALING*** (deeds)
- ✓ Matthew 9:35 – And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, ***teaching*** in their synagogues and ***proclaiming*** the gospel of the kingdom and ***HEALING*** every disease and every affliction.

It's pretty clear that Matthew wants us to see Jesus' words and deeds as two sides of the same coin. In Jesus, words and deeds *always go together*, and the one can only be fully understood and fully appreciated in the light of the other. So the teaching of Jesus (words) is more fully understood and appreciated when we come face to face with His divine nature and power as revealed in His miracles of healing (deeds). For those who have faith, the *deeds* of Jesus authenticate the *words* of Jesus. But we must come to see that the reverse is also true. The deeds of Jesus can only be fully understood in the light of His teaching and preaching about the gospel of the Kingdom. For those who have faith, the *words* of Jesus explain the *meaning* of His *deeds*. This is something that we don't often think about. But again, for Matthew, Jesus' deeds should never be divorced from His words. They should never be considered apart from His message.

And what was the kernel, what was the heart and soul of Jesus' message? It was the gospel of the kingdom (4:23). And what was the Gospel of the kingdom? It was the good news that the promised rule and reign of God had come in the Messiah. So if this was the *message* of Jesus, then what does this tell us about the *meaning* of His *deeds* – and especially His miracles of healing? It tells us that in Jesus' miracles, God's rule and reign is assaulting the rule and reign of Satan. Jesus' miraculous deeds of healing are nothing less than a military offensive against the realm of the devil. As one writer puts it, "The Son of God was going forth to war"!

**II. Verse 23** – And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

Notice that Matthew says Jesus healed *every* disease and *every* affliction among the people. The point is not that Jesus healed every single case of sickness in all of Galilee, but that He healed every *kind* of sickness. There was *no* sickness resistant to the authority of His healing word – whether it was a severe and dangerous disease or the more common afflictions, weaknesses, and disabilities among the people, they were *all* subject to His power! This point is emphasized even further in the next verse.

**III. Verse 24** – So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.

The Greek word for "sick" literally means "bad" or "evil" and so it refers to those who are suffering from an evil plight. In other words, this isn't just a physical or medical observation, it's also an emotional and mental observation. The sick are those who are suffering and hurting as a

result of their evil plight. The Greek word for “*afflicted*” means to be compressed, to hold or press together. And so the idea here is of people who are hard-pressed, overwhelmed, and weighed down under their physical afflictions (diseases and pains). “*Diseases*” refers to sicknesses that are very severe and life-threatening. “*Pains*” reminds us again that the point is not so much the sickness itself as it is the effects of the sickness. So here are cases of severe, debilitating pain. We could appropriately translate the Greek word with “torments”. And finally, we have “those *oppressed by* demons, epileptics [lit. those *subject to* fits], and paralytics [those who were *paralyzed*]” In each of these instances, the emphasis remains on the experience of suffering. Matthew carefully distinguishes between the physical effects of demon possession and the physical effects of a medical problem, but ultimately, it all results in physical pain, suffering, affliction, and hardship. Wycliffe translates the beginning of verse 24 like this: “They offered to him all men having evil, taken with divers sorrows and torments.”

Now here is what we need to understand: All of these things are works of the devil. I want to say right away that God will always accomplish His purposes and glorify His name even in and through the works of the devil. It is often God’s will that we should suffer physical afflictions. It is not always God’s will that we should be healed in this life (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Disease and pain are not always the result of personal, unconfessed sin in our lives (John 9:1-3). But we can safely say that in this world, sicknesses, diseases, pains, and afflictions are all works of the devil. They are the fruits of his rule and reign as the god of this world. They are the results of living as sinners in a fallen, sin-stained world. Paul says in Romans 5:12 that “sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” And so we can also say that sickness, disease, and pain came into this world through sin. And because sin is a work of the devil, so also are all of its effects! At a certain level, we need to see the devil in the flu, in the fever, in the cancer, in the pain and disease – though as Christians, we ultimately see God and His hand of providence (see below).

What I see in these verses is that physical suffering and pain is very, very real. And Jesus understood that. And Jesus did something about it. Matthew puts it very simply:

#### IV. “And he healed them.”

To borrow the words of the Apostle John, every time Jesus healed someone, He was destroying the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). Every time Jesus healed someone it was a declaration of war, it was a battle won, and it symbolized the inexorable, irresistible, and unstoppable advance of God’s rule and reign into territory previously held by Satan.

- ✓ Matthew 12:28 – But if it is by the Spirit of God that *I cast out demons*, then *the kingdom* [rule and reign] *of God has come upon you*.
- ✓ Matthew 10:1, 5-8 (cf. Luke 9:1-2) – And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them *authority over unclean spirits*, to cast them out, and *to heal every disease and every affliction*... These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them... “proclaim as you go, saying, ‘*The kingdom* [rule and reign] *of heaven is at hand*.’ *Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons*.
- ✓ Luke 10:8-9, 17-19 – “Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. *Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom* [rule and reign] *of God has*

*come near to you.*” ... The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” And he said to them, “***I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.*** Behold, ***I have given you authority*** to tread on serpents and scorpions, and ***over all the power of the enemy***, and nothing shall hurt you.”

As we will see throughout the book of Matthew, in the ministry of Jesus, physical healing almost always assumes spiritual healing and the forgiveness of sins (the requirement of faith). And so we could also say that spiritual healing is always meant to result in the physical redemption of our bodies. Jesus came to redeem us as whole persons – body, soul, and spirit. He came to deliver us from the rule of Satan both spiritually and physically. I’m reminded (no doubt along with the crowds of Jesus’ day) of Isaiah 35:

- ✓ Isaiah 35 – The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.” ***Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.*** For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; ***they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.***

When Jesus healed the afflicted, it was a sign of the rule and reign of God invading the realm of Satan. When Jesus healed the diseased, it signified the arrival of God’s salvation in the coming of the kingdom promised so long ago. When Jesus healed the sick, it was a trampling of Satan, it was the destruction of his works, and it was the guarantee of our final and completed salvation, when even our bodies will be fully redeemed (Romans 8:23). The salvation of our souls ultimately means the salvation of our bodies. The salvation of our bodies will be the outward sign of the salvation of our souls. When Jesus healed the sick, it was a symbol of salvation, both spiritual and physical.

- ✓ Revelation 21:4-5 – [God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we can see several lessons to be learned. First of all, God is powerful to heal the sick – even today. As we see from the ministry of Jesus, healing for God is not anything even remotely difficult. Just like in the original creation, God has only to speak the word. God does not always promise healing, but He does invite us to come to Him with all of our requests.

Second of all, we need to see the works of the devil in *all* of our sicknesses and pains and diseases (even the common cold). Jesus *healed* the sick. Why? Because physical suffering and affliction are not *God's* ultimate plan and purpose for His children. They are works of the devil. They are the fruits of living as sinners in a fallen, sin-stained world. And so our sicknesses should cause us to see more clearly the destructiveness of sin and to long more fervently for the consummation of the kingdom – when the rule and reign of Jesus will have abolished not only the enemy of sickness, but even death itself (1 Cor. 15:25-26).

The third thing we need to acknowledge is that while sickness and disease and pain are not God's ultimate plan and purpose for us, God in His sovereignty has not yet vanquished these enemies from the world. 1 Corinthians 15:25 says that Jesus “must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” And then Paul tells us that death (which includes all physical disease and sickness and pain) is the *last* enemy that will be abolished (1 Cor. 15:26). So since it is God who has *allowed* these things to remain until today, we don't need to despair at the works of the devil. Instead, we can learn to trust that God's good hand of providence is in all things. God has ordained that even the works of the devil (including sickness and disease and pain) will *all* serve our ultimate good and His own glory. As we have seen, God can use sickness to wean our hearts from this fallen and sinful world. God can use sickness to test our faith and teach us perseverance and endurance (Romans 5:3-5). God may use sickness to discipline us when we sin (Revelation 3:19; but this should not lead to paranoia). And often God's full purposes simply remain a mystery. But we can *always trust* Him because we know that He *is* sovereign over sickness.

Matthew's simple statement, “and he healed them”, presents itself to us as something to be grasped and taken hold of by faith. We are called to believe not just the fact that Jesus healed, but rather all that these healings *meant*, and all that they *still mean* today. And what is that? The *saving* rule and reign of God has come. And even now, Jesus is destroying the works of the devil. It's just a matter of time until the last enemy is abolished and all sickness, and disease, and pain will no longer even be remembered (Isaiah 65:17). In that day, “the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.” Imagine it! And there shall be no more pain, for the former things will have all passed away. And we can *know* this because already 2000 years ago Jesus “went throughout all Galilee... proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and *healing* every disease and every affliction among the people.”

## Teaching our Children

- Q.** When Jesus was traveling throughout all the land of Galilee, what was He doing? (What *two* things did He spend His time doing?)
- A. Jesus went throughout all of Galilee **teaching** and **healing** (words and deeds).
- Q.** What was Jesus teaching about?
- A. Jesus was teaching about the good news of the Kingdom (the coming of God’s powerful rule and reign).
- Q.** What kinds of sicknesses did Jesus heal? Were there any sicknesses that could resist His authority?
- A. Jesus healed every kind of sickness there was (see 4:23-24)! There was no kind of sickness or pain, or disability (deaf, lame, blind, mute) that could resist Jesus’ powerful word.
- Q.** Sicknesses, diseases, pains, and afflictions (including colds, flus, etc.) are all works of who?
- A. They are all works of the devil (Satan)
- ~ Make sure your children know that Satan does not actually come and make us sick! Sicknesses are in the world because of sin (Rom. 5:12), and sin is the work of Satan (1 Jn. 3:8). ***So sickness and pain are always a reminder that we live in a world that has fallen under the power of Satan.***
  - ~ Make sure your children also understand that most sicknesses are not the direct result of our own personal sin (2 Cor. 12:7-10; John 9:1-3).
- Q.** If sicknesses, diseases, and pains are all works of the devil, then what does it mean when Jesus actually *heals* all of these afflictions?
- A. When Jesus heals the sick and afflicted, He is going to war against Satan and destroying his works! The rule and reign of God is far more powerful than Satan’s rule! (See Scriptures under IV. A.)
- Q.** When Jesus healed a person’s body, it usually meant that He had also “healed” them on the inside (given them faith and the forgiveness of sins). So when Jesus “heals” *us* on the inside, what does this mean that He will do one day in the future?
- A. One day Jesus will even redeem our *bodies* so that we will never have any physical pain or sickness ever again. When God saves a person, he saves his spirit *and* his body (he saves *all* of him)! (See Scriptures under IV. C. & E.; cf. Romans 8:22-23)
- Q.** What is one way we can be sure that if we have trusted in Jesus, He will one day redeem our bodies from all sickness and pain?
- A. Because already 2000 years ago, Jesus went through all of Galilee healing every disease and every affliction among the people!
- Q.** Can God still heal sicknesses today?
- A. YES! And we can *ask* Him for healing.
- ~ Explain to your children that since God has still allowed sicknesses to remain in the world (death is the last enemy that God will abolish), healing is not always God’s will.
- Q.** Since it is *God* who has *allowed* sickness and pain to remain in the world for right now, can we trust Him to use even these “works of the devil” for our good (Romans 8:28)?
- A. Yes.
- ~ God can use sickness to help us see the destructiveness of sin and to long for the day when His righteous rule fills all the earth and there is no more sin.
  - ~ God can use sickness to test our faith and teach us perseverance and endurance.
  - ~ God may use sickness to discipline us when we sin (but this should not lead to paranoia).
  - ~ Sometimes God’s purpose may be a mystery. But we can *always trust* Him.