

What Is God's Agenda for Me?

A Study of Matthew 4:23-25

Characteristic of Completeness: Discipleship

Big Idea: Cast like the King.

Related Scriptures: Matthew 9:35-10:8; 28:19-20; Luke 10:25-37;

2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Galatians 6:2; Colossians 1:28; 3:12, 16;

1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Timothy 2:2; Hebrews 5:12; James 1:27

Introduction:

1. The steam wafted from his rounded ceramic cup, freshly topped off by the waitress. Black, no cream. His fork crunched through the hash browns. And I was wondering why he asked me to meet him for breakfast.

I didn't have to wait long. The small talk gave way to a gravity in his voice. He looked up at me and said, "Bob, I don't know what God wants me to do with the rest of my life. What is God's agenda for me? What does He want me to do?"

This was a man rarely at a loss. A successful CEO, he knew how to run a business. He knew how to run with the big dogs. But he didn't know how to run with Jesus. He knew what customers wanted. He knew what employees wanted. But he didn't know what Jesus wanted. Not exactly. It was fuzzy. He was used to one-page summaries with bullet points and action items and deadlines. But the Bible is not like that.

He thought I could relate to his situation. "I know you were in business for years," he said, "so you know what it's like."

My mind drifted back to a boardroom where, years before, I sat with a handful of fellow corporate officers. Charcoal suit. Tie in a half Windsor. Long sleeve, pinpoint oxford, medium starch. A colleague said, "We need to find another VP—someone who has a heart for product development."

The leather groaned softly as I leaned back in my chair and thought to myself: How ironic. We're looking for a guy with a heart, and I'm not sure I have a heart. Not for what I'm doing right now. What is God's agenda for me? What does God want me to do with the rest of my life?

2. Such questions are not unique to businessmen. Maybe you're a mom and the kids are out of the house. What now? What is God's agenda for you?

Or you're student about to graduate. What now?

Or you're about to have a child. What now?

Or you've just been laid off because of the housing downturn. What now?

Or you're about to retire. What now?

What is God's agenda for you?

3. Today, we're going to get some help in answering this question. We're going to study a passage from the Bible that gives us some insight into what God's agenda is for us and how we, as believers, can participate. We're going to discover from the biblical text what God is up to and what He wants from us, His followers.
4. Before we turn to our text for today, I want to set the stage. We've been studying our way through the gospel of Matthew. It is now early in the earthly ministry of Jesus. He has just called some disciples—Peter, Andrew, James, and John—to follow Him. They are fishermen by trade, and Jesus ► says to them:

^{NAU} Matthew 4:19 . . . “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

At that moment, I suspect the fishermen know little more than my friend at breakfast about what the Lord's agenda is for them. “Fishers of men” is catchy, but cryptic. What is the Lord's agenda for His followers? The short answer seems to be: Go fish. Go fish for men. But the early disciples don't yet fully understand what this means. They're probably thinking, “I know how to catch fish. But I don't know how to catch men.”

So Jesus shows them. The fishermen get a lesson from the King on how to cast. Jesus models for them what it means to “go fish” from His point of view. Our text for today presents a summary of Jesus' earthly ministry. It's a review of the things He did, the example He set, the ministry model He provided for His followers.

From our text, I want to show you that God's agenda for His followers is to cast like the King. That's ► the big idea of my message: Cast like the King. That is, follow the example set by Christ in fishing for men. Emulate the Master Fisher of men.

Specifically, I want to show you that there are ► three ways to cast like the King. There are three bullet points on the Lord's to-do list for us. The Lord modeled the importance of three things that He wants us to do to fish for men. Here's the list. One: ► Teach the Word. Two: ► Proclaim the gospel. And three: ► Heal the broken. So if the question is: What is God's agenda for my life? The basic answer is to cast like the King, and there are three ways to do it: teaching, proclaiming, and healing. These three are presented in the first verse of our text in Matthew 4:23. If you have your Bible, please turn to ► Matthew 4:23. Notice the three words as I read:

^{NAU} Matthew 4:23 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.

There are ► those words: teaching, proclaiming, and healing. All in the present tense, indicating that this is Jesus' ongoing ministry.

And ours. Yes, it's our ministry, too.

5. Some of you aren't buying this. Not the *ours* part. Some of you are thinking it's true, but not for you, especially the healing. "Look at the text, Bob. It was *Jesus* who was doing these things. *Jesus*. I don't see how this means that we're supposed to do them, too. Didn't you say a couple of weeks ago that Matthew is written primarily to Jews to show that Jesus is their King? So, isn't Jesus simply demonstrating through these remarkable things that He is the King, the Messiah?"

Good point. I think Jesus *is* demonstrating that He is the King. At the same time, He's modeling or setting an example for disciples to follow. I think that's why Matthew places this description of Jesus' earthly ministry immediately after His call to discipleship. In fact, this entire message is really about discipleship. ► Discipleship is our Characteristic of Completeness in Christ. Let me show you.

First, Jesus ► says:

^{NAU} Matthew 4:19 . . . "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Then, He shows them how to fish. The description in our text is essentially Jesus taking His disciples on a fishing trip. The school of fishing is now in session. First, they watch Jesus fish. They watch Him cast. They observe His approach. They consider His angle.

Then later on, Jesus delegates the work to them. In ► Matthew 9:35, Matthew repeats almost exactly the summary of Jesus' ministry that appears in our text. This is Jesus' agenda:

^{NAU} Matthew 9:35 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.

Then Jesus says to His disciples in ► Matthew 9:37:

^{NAU} Matthew 9:37 . . . "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few."

That is to say: "There are a lot of fish to be harvested, a lot of people to be reached." So Jesus deploys His disciples. "You've watched Me long enough. Now, you go and do

the same thing I've been doing. Cast like the King: teach, preach, and heal." He says in ► Matthew 10:7-8:

^{NAU} Matthew 10:7 "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 8 Heal *the* sick, raise *the* dead, cleanse *the* lepers, cast out demons."

"But," you say, "Come on, Bob. Those were the Twelve Disciples. They were special disciples—capital 'D' disciples, with extraordinary God-given abilities. That's not me. I'm not a teacher. I'm not a preacher. And I'm certainly not a healer."

Not ► so fast. I concede that the Twelve were in some ways extraordinary. But I also want to show that they represent what God designed you to be: a teacher, a preacher, *and* a healer. God's agenda for you and me is to cast like the King. And we do that three ways: teaching, proclaiming, and healing. Let's figure out what this means for us, one way at a time.

I. The ► first way to cast like the King is to teach.

- A. Our ► immediate text doesn't tell us much at all about the teaching. It just gives us the ► Greek word: *di-DAS-koe*. The word generally describes apologetic or ethical teaching—moral teaching about right and wrong thinking and right and wrong behavior.¹ We don't get specifics. But we don't have to go far to find out what's involved. You see, later on in Matthew, Jesus tells His followers more about teaching. In ► Matthew 28:19-20, He says to His disciples,

^{NAU} Matthew 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ► 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you . . ."

This tells us something about the teachers, the learners, and the lessons involved in the teaching.

1. This tells us, for example, that the teachers are disciples. That's who Jesus is speaking to. Jesus expects His disciples, His followers, His believers to teach just as He taught: "Teach them to observe all that I commanded you." Notice Jesus doesn't qualify the command to teach. He doesn't say, "Now those of you with the gift of teaching should teach, but the rest of you, never mind." Of course, not everybody can or should teach in the same way. But in general, teaching is the norm for all disciples.
2. This also tells us about the learners. The learners are disciples in the making. Teaching is a part of helping people to follow Jesus. The implication is that the

¹ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 155.

teaching is mostly to believers, mostly to those willing to follow. It is not so much moralizing at unbelievers who have no interest in Jesus.

3. This also tells us about the lessons. The lessons are based on what the Lord has commanded. For us, that would be the Bible because that's where we find the Lord's commands. It's teaching from the Word of God.

Put it all together, and you have a discipleship process. Teachers teach learners until the learners become teachers.² One generation teaches another. That's how disciples are made.

How ► long does that take? How long before you can teach? I don't have a definitive answer, but I suspect it's shorter than you think. The time between Jesus saying "Come follow Me" in Matthew 4 and "Now you go" in Matthew 10 is about a year.³ Having learned, we are to teach. We never stop learning, but we are to teach.

- B. How can you teach? Well, let's go back to my friend, the businessman at breakfast. He's not a Bible scholar. In fact, he's still got questions about the Bible. There are things he doesn't understand. And he's not a particularly good public speaker. How could he teach? What would I tell him?

1. Well, he has children at home. The Bible tells us that parents have a responsibility to teach their children the Word of God.⁴ It's a responsibility that can't really be passed off to the church children's program or a Christian school.

When my children were growing up, most of my teaching for them was informal. When I would make an effort to spend time with them, particularly one on one, teaching moments would arise naturally. For example, when my son Chase was in elementary school, we used to have season tickets to Suns basketball games. It was back when they played in the old Coliseum.

I remember going to a game one evening. We knew that some of the players on the Suns were professing Christians, so we prayed for them in the car. Not to win. But to represent Christ well. To be like Christ. In that moment, I am a teacher. "It is good to pray for others. And it's more important to be Christ-like than to win."

Moments later, we had just parked in the Bank of America parking garage downtown, and we were walking on the street, together with a small crowd of purple-and-orange-clad fans moving with brisk anticipation. We approached

² The process is explained in 2 Timothy 2:2.

³ Johnston M. Cheney and Stanley Ellisen, *Jesus Christ: The Greatest Life Ever Lived*, (Eugene, OR: Paradise Publishing, 1999), 48, 66.

⁴ Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Ephesians 6:4.

an intersection and the red sign blinked, “Don’t walk.” The crowd ignored it and hurried right on through, toward the game.

We stopped. The sign blinked, “Don’t walk.” So there we were. A man and his little boy, hand in hand, standing alone. The eager crowd left us behind. Chase looked at the crowd and glanced up at me. In that moment, I am a teacher: “It is good to obey God-given authorities, even when everybody else isn’t.”

We’re inside the Coliseum, enjoying the game, and there’s a timeout. The scantily clad cheerleaders come onto the court and as they begin to undulate, binoculars all over the arena rise in unison to meet men’s eyes. Chase is too young to care, but notices the connection. In that moment, I am a teacher: “It is not appropriate to gawk at women, even when it’s invited.”

2. Well, maybe you don’t have children at home. You can still be a teacher, even without volunteering for some position. Say you’re involved in a Life Group here at Moon Valley. It’s where we do the Christian life together, in the community of a small group. A part of what we do is tell what God seems to be doing in our lives as we try to apply the Bible.

Think of it this way. Life Group is not just a place where you go to get something. And applying the Bible to your life is not just something you do for yourself. You see, there are learners in your Life Group. When you work to apply the Bible to your life during the week, and you share with others at Life Group what happened as a result, in that moment, you are a teacher. Not a pontificator. Please, no pontification. You are a teacher.

You can teach. The first way to cast like the King is to teach.

II. The ► second way is to proclaim. Specifically, it’s proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.

- A. Some translations of ► our text call it preaching, and it is, but it’s not necessarily the kind of preaching you hear on Sunday morning. Proclaiming the gospel is distinguished from teaching by its goal. Teaching is primarily to instruct; proclaiming is primarily to convert.⁵ Proclaiming the gospel is also distinguished from teaching by its audience. Teaching is primarily to believers; proclaiming is primarily to unbelievers. Proclaiming is telling unbelievers about the good news of Jesus Christ, with the hope that they will receive Him as Savior. Proclaiming is evangelizing. Proclaiming is witnessing.

Which is a bit of a bummer because this is not a popular topic. But maybe it’s because we’ve been looking at it like cold-call sales.

⁵ Keener, 155.

B. Let's go back to my friend, the businessman at breakfast. He's not an evangelist. He doesn't feel like he knows the Jesus product well enough to be a successful salesman. There are some questions about Jesus he just can't answer and so he doesn't want to risk coming off like a fool. So, how could he proclaim? What would I tell him?

1. The first thing I'd tell him is this is not sales. It's not trying to talk somebody into buying something based on smooth talk or cleverness.

For the most part, it's just telling folks what has happened to you when the opportunity presents itself. No need to come off like you know more than you do.

I've been to seminary. I study the Bible a lot. And I still can't answer a lot of questions. Don't need to. I just tell what I know and admit what I don't.

Jesus loves me so much He died to pay for my sins. I know that. And He promises me eternal life if I simply believe Him for it. I know that. I have come to believe. I know that. And He's renewed my life. I know that. That's the good news.

It's the good *news*. Not the good argument. Not the good delivery. Not the good close.

2. I encourage you to take one small, but important step in the direction of proclaiming this week. Who do you know, who do you come in contact with, who in your circle needs Jesus? Who comes to mind? Maybe it's a neighbor. Or a coworker. Or a family member. Who comes to mind?

Would you pray for that person this week and beyond? Would you pray that God would give you an opportunity to proclaim the good news to that person? Would you pray for the eyes to see the opportunity? Would you pray for the sensitivity and the courage and the words to seize the opportunity as the Holy Spirit leads you?

3. We are to proclaim. That's why the Lord leaves us here on earth after we're saved. We've got a job to do. If it were all about us, or all about happiness and good times, He'd just take us to heaven.

Casting like the King involves first, teaching; second, proclaiming.

III. Finally, ► the third way to cast like the King is to heal. The Greek word for healing is *thera-POU-oh*. It's the word from which we derive our English word, therapy.

- A. This is the hardest agenda item for us to swallow, particularly when we consider what Jesus did to heal people. Our text indicates that Jesus exercised authority over every kind of illness: physical, emotional, and spiritual. Look with me at ► Matthew 4:23-24. It says:

^{NAU} Matthew 4:23 Jesus was . . . healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. 24 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.

We have already seen that Jesus passed on this miraculous healing authority to the Twelve Disciples, also called apostles. And they brought miraculous healing to people.

But no disciples I know are regularly and miraculously healing such illnesses today. And I'm very skeptical of the ones on TV who say they are. I don't doubt that God has the power and authority to bring healing to anyone at any time in any way He wants. And I don't doubt that miraculous healing occurs today. I pray for it often. I just don't see it happening as much.

- B. Why is that? Some Bible scholars have argued that healing in the first century at the hands of Jesus and His initial disciples was primarily to authenticate their message.⁶ Healing, they say, set the stage, it provided the opportunity, it drew the crowds. And then the people could hear the truth about salvation, because the truth-tellers had been authenticated.

Indeed, healing does appear to be a major draw in our text. Once news got out that Jesus was healing all kinds of illnesses, people came from all over to see Him. In ► Matthew 4:24-25, it says,

^{NAU} Matthew 4:24 The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill . . . 25 Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and *the* Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and *from* beyond the Jordan.

That is to say healing drew big crowds from all over. But once critical mass had been reached, once the foundation had been laid, the need for authentication through miraculous healing diminished, and along with it, instances of healing in the Bible diminish over time. That's the idea. That's one explanation for why miraculous healing is not as prevalent today. It jump-started the early movement, but it's not the ongoing show.

- C. Nevertheless, I think healing is still on God's agenda for us, even if the miracle of it is not as obvious. The Bible tells us that Jesus felt compassion for those in need of

⁶ See, for example, Richard Mayhue, *The Healing Promise*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994), 112.

healing;⁷ healing wasn't just a gimmick. Are we not to feel the same compassion? Compassionately meeting human needs still authenticates our message today. Caring for people who are physically, emotionally, or spiritually oppressed still provides opportunities to proclaim the good news about Jesus.⁸ You don't have to be Oral Roberts to be a minister of God's healing in the life of another person.

How ► could you have a healing ministry? My friend, the businessman at breakfast. The closest he's been to a healing ministry is telling an Oral Roberts joke. To him, modern healers are hucksters, and he wants no part of it. So, how could he heal? Of course he could pray for healing. We can all do that. Beyond that, what would I tell him?

I'd tell him the story of a young Latina woman. She works down at the Good Will store, and has come to our ESL program on Tuesday nights to learn English. She has gotten to know some of the Moon Valley folks who volunteer their time to help out in the ESL program. They're just normal folks, some of whom don't even speak Spanish.

Some time ago, the apartment where this young Latina woman lives was burglarized. They took everything. TV. VCR. Even the toilet paper. Upon hearing the news, one of our Moon Valley women in ESL went to be with her and to help. In that moment, she was a healer.

Some time later, on a Tuesday ESL night, the same Latina woman—perhaps assured that we can be trusted—she shared some family problems that had been a tremendous burden for her. Another one of the ESL volunteers offered to pray for her. He prayed. And he had the opportunity to gently proclaim to her the good news of Jesus Christ. I saw the tears of relief roll down her cheeks. In that moment, he was a healer.

Still later, the young woman was suffering from several abscessed teeth. She had never been to a dentist. Not ever. And she had no money to pay for dental work. So we arranged for her to visit a dentist in our congregation who performed some work that was badly needed. In that moment, he was a healer.

Caring for people who are physically, emotionally, or spiritually oppressed still provides opportunities to proclaim the good news about Jesus.

You ► can teach. You can proclaim. You can heal, through Christ. And when you do, you're casting like the King.

⁷ Matthew 9:36.

⁸ Matthew 5:14-16.