

It's coming – whether you want it or not. It may not affect you now or even for a couple of years, it may not even affect you. But it has the potential to impact many of us in the workforce or at some schools if we happen to use a computer. What is coming? Microsoft has introduced Windows 10. Windows is the operating system that helps some computer users interact with their machine. It has gone through multiple versions over the past 20 plus years. I still remember Windows 3.0. Then along came Windows 95 and 98; Vista and Windows 7. Then they introduced Windows 8 which looked a lot like Apple's systems. Now Windows 10 is coming which will be placed on a lot of new computers that you may purchase in 1-3 years.

I so love these updates and new versions. Just when you are, you're getting a handle on how to work with a particular system, they change something. Whether you like it or not change is coming – will you adapt to it or resist it?

Now of course some of you are saying “well that's Microsoft. I have an Apple product. It's way better than stupid Windows. Nothing like that ever happens with Apple.” Well I have an Apple product as well. My tablet is an iPad. It can do some very neat stuff. It worked quite well. It was loaded with Apples iOS 7 operating system. It worked well – until this past fall. Apple introduced iOS8. So I dutifully downloaded the updated version of Apple's operating system. Ever since that wonderful update, my Wi-Fi is slower, I cannot get onto the Internet on my tablet unless I turn my Wi-Fi off to disconnect from my home network and reconnect. Sometimes I have to do that 2 or 3 times. I have downloaded all the patches and updates and I still have to do it. So all of you Apple disciples out there who go around saying “nothing ever bad happens with Apple. It's so beautiful”. Well I'm experiencing both sides and have the same problem. They change things that work perfectly fine and I have to adapt to them.

Changes come in life whether we want them to or not. You may have heard the expression “Change is Inevitable. Growth or maturity is optional.” In that we can choose to handle them in a mature or immature way. Change happens in technology. Change comes with aging. Changes come with graduations, promotions, demotions and falling oil prices. Change is an inevitable part of our Christian lives. The changes required are all for our good. But we can still resist them.

Some of us don't like change. I would argue all of us don't like some changes that kick us out of our comfort zones. But change is inevitable in the Christian's life. It comes in the form of God's advancing kingdom. It continues to move forward in this world every day. When Jesus returns it will come in its fullness. There will be no doubt in anyone's mind that Jesus is the king of kings and lord of lords. But until then, God's kingdom advances in the world. And Jesus constantly works to advance God's kingdom in our lives. But will we receive it or resist it?

If you're a Christ follower, by definition you have declared you want to follow Christ. You have said that you are willing to follow Him as He advances God's kingdom in the world and in your life. But sometimes we might not like where Jesus advances. We're not ready to give over that part of our life to Him. People throughout Jesus' ministry on earth faced this same question. Would they open their lives up to Jesus and His advance of God's kingdom or would they turn away from Him? That's where the next section of about Jesus' life in Matthew takes us.

Through this passage, we will see how Jesus advances the kingdom of heaven. We'll also consider how He continues to do the same work in our world and in our lives today. Then we want to examine whether we are receptive or resistant to changes Jesus wants to do in our lives. The first advance is found in Matthew 4:12-17.

Matthew 4:12-17 (ESV)

12 Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. 13 And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

15 "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
16 the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned."

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

But before we plunge in to the ways Jesus' advanced the kingdom, we need to define something. **What is the kingdom of heaven?** John the Baptist referred to this in his call back in Matthew 3:2. John preached, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus repeats this same phrase in our passage today. But what is the kingdom of heaven? Well a kingdom has a king and a realm or area in which he reigns. Since God rules over heaven, I take this the kingdom of heaven to mean God's kingdom. He is the king and heaven is his realm.

But with Jesus' arrival, the kingdom of heaven came upon Earth in a new way. ***So the kingdom of heaven is the reign of God over the universe, the world and individual lives.*** But if you look around, you don't immediately see evidence of God's rule on earth on our earth. There's bad stuff happening & evil & illness & death. But that does not mean the kingdom of heaven has left. The kingdom is already here but not yet in its fullness kingdom. It is a kingdom that has brought peace but not yet full peace. The kingdom brings healing but not yet complete freedom from sickness. The kingdom brings eternal life but not yet freedom from death. We must keep this "already here but not yet complete kingdom" in mind as we go through Matthew and this passage.

How does Jesus advance God's kingdom?

He brings kingdom light into the darkness. Matthew begins by informing us of John's arrest. He will describe what actually happened later in Matthew 14. But here, he includes a change in location for Jesus' ministry. Remember he came down from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized. Then he went into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. John gets arrested by Herod Antipas for political purposes and because John criticized Antipas' relationship with his wife. She was in fact his brother's wife and Antipas stole her. So Antipas finally has John arrested.

So Jesus "withdraws" to Galilee. Now some interpret this to mean that it was too dangerous for Jesus to minister in the south because John had been arrested there. That could be a reason for Jesus' withdrawal. But Antipas ruled over the northern part of the country including Galilee. In fact, if you look at the map, Herod's capital city was Tiberius, only a few kilometers down the lake from Jesus' home base of Capernaum. So Jesus may have withdrawn for safety. Or He may have "withdrawn" from the southern part to go right into the den of the enemy. After all, Jesus is bringing light to darkness.

But Matthew's main point seems to be that Jesus moved back to Galilee. He moves from his home town of Nazareth to Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. It had a fishing industry and sat on a trade route. So Jesus picks a city where he can reach more people. Matthew then ties this move to prophecy. Zebulun and Naphtali were tribes of Israel. When they first conquered the Promised Land, these tribes were given the territory in the North. In Jesus time the tribes no longer existed as governing their own territory, but the Jews still knew the regions as land of Naphtali and Zebulun.

These two regions had shown up in a famous prophecy by Isaiah about 700 years earlier. We are more familiar with the later part of the prophecy. “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given and the government shall be on his shoulders and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6-7. This is a promise of the Messiah. But the prophecy also contained information on where the Messiah would reveal himself. “Land of Naphtali, Land of Zebulun, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations, the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.” That’s Isaiah 9:1-2. Matthew quotes that in verses 15 and 16 of our passage.

But why was this land so dark? Why would people living there be designated as “those dwelling in the region of the shadow of death?” Well, there are several possible reasons. This land was surrounded on three sides by non-Jews. In the Old Testament, God’s people were considered light to the nations. And the nations were in darkness needing that light. So darkness surrounded them until 722 when things got worse. The Assyrians invaded and conquered the northern kingdom. All of a sudden “darkness” in the form of another kingdom reigned over the people. This conquest led to immigration from other nations. It also led to intermarriage between the Jews and their conquerors. So the light was being symbolically overwhelmed by the darkness. Then in Jesus’ day, there was another reason that Galilee was called darkness. It was far from Jerusalem, the religious center of the people. The second temple still stood there. People made pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the feasts. And Galilee had little or no status in the eyes of the nation, especially among the powerful and elite in Jerusalem.

Yet it is here that Jesus will reveal Himself. It is here that Jesus will bring the kingdom’s light to begin shining. In fact, He Himself is the light that will bring hope to these people who live in this northern territory away from the seat of power. If Jesus were to come to Canada, it would be like he started His ministry in the Northwest Territories – a land that is dark for the most of the day right now. That’s how Galilee was viewed.

Yet, isn’t it time a great testimony to God’s heart for people in darkness? I find it greatly encouraging that Jesus started His ministry to people dwelling in darkness and the region called the shadow of death. Just as He shone his light in their lives, He shines Himself as light into my life. He called me out of the darkness of life apart from God. He continues to shine His light into any darkness that remains in my life. He continues to work in me to remove the darkness until one day there will be none left. The same is true for you. God pursues you with His light. He wants to

invade the darkness in your life and expose it for what it really is. He wants you to escape from thinking that life must only be lived in this darkness. He is the light and He has the way out of darkness into light.

So our response to Jesus' light in our lives must include continual opening of any dark corners of our lives to Jesus. Friends, is there some area of your life that you're trying to hide from Jesus? Is there some area that you may have successfully hidden from others but you haven't hidden from Him? That darkness can consume you if you don't bring it into the light. Don't harbor darkness. That's what the devil wants us to do. Instead bring it to Christ and bring it to other Christians who can pray and support you from crawling back into those dark corners. Jesus brings Kingdom light to people living in darkness.

But the advance of the kingdom of heaven does not stop with Jesus' move to Capernaum. It continues with a walk along the seashore.

Matthew 4:18-22 (ESV)

18 While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 19 And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21 And going 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, and he called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

How does Jesus advance the kingdom of heaven?

His kingdom authority calls for immediate obedience that disturbs ordinary life. (4:18-22)

Jesus walks alongside the seashore. He comes to 2 brothers casting a net. This net was circular and about 20-25 feet in diameter. It had lead sinkers attached to the outer edge. The fisherman would throw out the net while standing in a boat or shallow water. The net would be pulled down by the sinkers like a parachute, sinking to the bottom of the lake. Then fish would be trapped underneath and the fisherman would collect them.

Jesus looks out to them and says "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately, they leave their nets and follow him. We don't know if this means they left their nets in the water possibly with fish underneath. Or maybe they left their nets on the boat or the sea shore. But this was an intentional decisive act that showed they were leaving behind their primary livelihood to follow Jesus.

Jesus continues down the lake to see two more brothers – James and John the son of Zebedee. They weren't casting their nets but mending them. They likely used the trammel net. It contained three layers of net with up to 5

units or blocks each over a hundred feet long. They were strung between crews of two boats at night so the fish couldn't see the entangling nets. They would haul in the nets in the morning and see their catch. Then they would mend any tears in the net. This is what James and John work on when Jesus calls them. They too immediately get up and follow him leaving their father and the other crewman with the nets.

Now it's very unlikely that these four disciples first saw Jesus that morning. Scholars who have studied the New Testament basically identify 3 years of ministry for Jesus – One year we don't know much about. The second year was the one where Jesus went public. The third year was focused on going to the cross. During the first year of obscure ministry, Jesus likely made a lot of contacts. He talked to people and spent time with people like these brothers. The early parts of John's gospel tell us about these initial meetings with Jesus. These disciples believed that Jesus was the promised one. But their believing had not required much life change – until this moment.

Now Jesus calls them to follow Him. Both sets of brothers immediately follow. They have been prepared. They now drastically alter their lives to join Jesus. This call would cost these disciples economically. They were in a class above the common peasant. Fishermen were more independent and wealthier generally. James and John's father had hired servants. But these fishermen were willing to set aside their economic privilege and follow Jesus. They were still responsible for their families. Perhaps they went with Jesus on itinerant journeys and came back to work when they could. But they certainly didn't make as much as they could full time.

Yet Jesus commanded with an authority that demanded their immediate obedience. And it was not a threatening "do this or else authority". It was an invitation with authority. "Come and join me in the most important work in the world". This call disturbed their ordinary lives.

What about Jesus' call on your life? Are you willing to have your scheduled disturbed by Jesus? Is your family so scheduled that you don't even have time to hear and respond to Jesus' call? He may call you to a life of missions or ministry that requires a complete change in direction for your life and planning. Or He may call you to remain where you are but to live very differently than you've been currently living.

In what area is Jesus calling you to move forward today or change? When I was called to the ministry, it was a very disturbing proposition. I was set on the path of working M-F 8-5 with weekends off. Being a pastor ruins your weekends. It has required me to move across the country twice; endure some soul shaping and life changing challenges

– grown me in more ways than I could imagine and continued to grow and shape me each day. Yet my obedience to this calling is one that needs to be renewed daily. Will I enter into what Jesus is calling me today or do I find myself resisting his call? If Jesus came calling into your life while you were doing some ordinary activity, would you immediately obey?

Jesus advances the kingdom of heaven by bringing light into darkness. Jesus advances the kingdom by calling us to follow Him in every area of our lives. There's one more way found in this passage.

Matthew 4:23-25 (ESV)

[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. [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. [25](#) And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

How does Jesus advance the kingdom of heaven?

He brings kingdom hope through teaching, proclaiming and healing. (4:23-25)

Jesus engaged in a regular teaching ministry by going into the synagogues throughout Galilee. Some estimates put the population of this region at about 300,000 during the time of Christ. There would be lots of opportunities for people to hear Jesus' teach or hear about His teaching. He continued to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Gospel means good news. The good news was that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. It had arrived. God was on the move in a decisive way. He kept calling people to repent or change their minds about God because the kingdom of heaven had arrived.

And he healed; every disease and every affliction; those afflicted with diseases and pain; those oppressed by demons; epileptics; paralytics. He healed them. So Matthew tells us his fame spread throughout Syria – a non-Jewish region to the north of Galilee. And people from that area brought all their sick to Him. And He healed them.

So he teaches. He proclaims. He heals. People talk. People travel and the word spreads. Someone remarkable has arrived. And soon it is not only the disciples who are following him. Crowds composed of people from every part of the country follow Him. From the north and south – from around Jerusalem and beyond the Jordan where John ministered – people came. The kingdom of heaven advanced in a striking and significant way during this time.

Jesus continues this ministry today – Teaching, Proclaiming and Healing. We are about to jump into the first of 5 major sections of Jesus’ teaching starting in Matthew 5. The more we soak in Jesus’ teaching, the more that our lives will ooze His will and wisdom. Jesus continues to proclaim the good news of the kingdom in our lives through the Spirit and to others through us. Jesus continues to heal today. He doesn’t heal everyone. We do live in that already here but not yet complete kingdom. But Jesus heals diseases. He also can heal relationships; or bring healing through recovery. These all serve as evidence of the advancing kingdom of heaven in our world.

Our commentator summarizes Matthew 3 & 4 like this: Jesus was powerful enough to conquer the devilish ruler of this world, universal enough to include both Jews and Gentiles in his messianic gospel, authoritative enough to transform simple men into leaders of a movement that changed the course of history, and effective enough to attend to the basic needs of the people—body, soul, and spirit. This is the kind of messianic deliverer that advances the kingdom of God.

How will you respond to Jesus? Well I think he tells us how in verse 17. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. **Jesus’ constant advance of God’s kingdom requires our consistent repentance to receive it.** We need to turn away from our own way of doing things and towards the kingdom of heaven. We must no longer to invest in building our own kingdoms which won’t last anyway. Instead, we invest in God’s kingdom which will last for eternity.

Some of us here are people who still walk in darkness. But Jesus has revealed Himself as the light today. Will you receive Him?

Some of us have something in our lives we need to repent or turn away from. Will you repent today?

Some of us need that kingdom hope. We need teaching or good news or healing. Will you receive what Jesus has for you this day?

I want to invite you to respond to Jesus by holding your hands out to receive from Him as we now pray.