

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

JOIN US IN CHANGING THE WORLD

*From that time on Jesus began to preach,
"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."*

- Matthew 4:17 (NIV)

Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: "God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."

- Matthew 28:18-20 (The Message)

"The kingdom of heaven has drawn near." In Matthew's Gospel, these words are first spoken by John the Baptist as he announces that Jesus is coming, and then by Jesus as he begins his teaching. Jesus invites others to follow him, and He teaches them what it means to live as though the kingdom of heaven is being realized in their presence. "Come follow me," Jesus says, "and let God's presence change the world through you." What does it look like to live today with this invitation of Jesus to let the Spirit change the world through our faith and our witness?

CHANGING THE WORLD

JAN 1

HERE WE GO!

Matthew 3:1-17

The baptism of Jesus is an important transition between the birth of Jesus and his adult ministry in all four Gospels. For Matthew, the story is an announcement of who Jesus is, and an invitation to see that in Jesus the kingdom is coming near.

You are invited to see who Jesus is and join in bringing the kingdom of heaven near. Here we go!

JAN 2-7

Monday	Read Matthew 3:1-3. What does it mean to “prepare the way for the Lord” in our lives? (NIV)
Tuesday	Read Matthew 3:4-6. Knowing that God forgives us and the water of baptism makes us new, what do you need to confess?
Wednesday	Read Matthew 3:7-10. What do you need to purge from your life or turn away from (repent) in order to focus more fully on your relationship with Jesus (be fruitful)?
Thursday	Read Matthew 3:11-12. What do you think it means to be baptized with not just water, but the Holy Spirit?
Friday	Read Matthew 3:13-15. Why do you think it was important for Jesus to be baptized?
Saturday	Read Matthew 3:16-17. What does it mean to you to be a child of God?

CIRCLE Study Questions:

1. What is something you are looking forward to in 2023?
2. In worship, we prayed to let go of things from the past year that hinder or hurt us. What do you need to let go of to move into 2023 freed by God’s grace.
3. Pastor Brian shared that in the moment we are baptized, we are claiming the truth that the Holy Spirit dwells within us. What does it mean to you to be baptized not just with water, but with the Holy Spirit?
4. Where do you sense the Holy Spirit nudging you, encouraging you, or challenging you? What would a “HERE WE GO” commitment look like for you right now?

FaithFit Challenge:

Make a commitment to grow in your relationship with Jesus in 2023. On January 15, you can join Clay Church, be baptized, or recommit and remember your baptism. Baptisms and baptism remembrance will be offered by sprinkling or full immersion. You can sign up to participate at claychurch.com/baptismsunday.

CHANGING THE WORLD

JAN 8

TEMPTATION

Matthew 4:1-11

Beginning with the story of creation, a pattern emerges in many of the water stories of the Bible. There is chaos and water. The Spirit hovers. God speaks. Order, or a path forward, emerges. Humanity is tempted or tested. Humanity fails to trust in God's story, and tragedy happens. In Matthew, the story repeats. The empire is in chaos. Jesus comes to the water. The Spirit hovers and descends. God speaks. A path emerges for Jesus. He is tempted. But now, in Jesus, the story takes a new turn. Instead of failing to trust God, Jesus internalized God's word and trusts in God's story, and no immediate tragedy occurs.

Will we choose to trust God's story?

JAN 9-14

Monday

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-19.

What tempts you? What draws you away from loving the LORD with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength?

Tuesday

Read Deuteronomy 8:1-18. In what ways do we "forget the Lord" (NIV), or minimize what God has done for us?

Wednesday

Read Matthew 4:1-4. Why do you think the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted?

Thursday

Read Matthew 4:5-7. In what ways do we test God, or try to use God's power for our own agenda or our own gain?

Friday

Read Matthew 4:8-11. What do you learn from Jesus about responding to and facing temptation?

Saturday

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. Do you believe that God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear? Why or why not?

CIRCLE Study Questions:

1. What can make it difficult to trust God?
2. On Sunday, Pastor Brian gave a list of ways we give into temptation. What does temptation, or turning away from God's provision, look like in your life?
3. What verses in the Bible can you turn to for strength and grounding in times of struggle or temptation?
4. In the message, Pastor Brian talked about trusting God's story. What does it mean to you to trust God's story?

FaithFit Challenge:

Set an alarm each day at a good time to take a few minutes to pray. At that time, pray through the Lord's Prayer. As you pray, notice your prayer for God's will to be done and the plea, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

CHANGING THE WORLD

JAN 15

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Matthew 4:12-17

When Matthew quotes Isaiah to describe the start of Jesus' ministry, he is referring back to a time of exile and darkness for the people of God. The prophet was encouraging the people not to give in to naysayers, but to put their hope in a future king who will establish a new kingdom. For Matthew, Jesus again brings this hope and promise.

You're invited to turn to the Spirit of God within you and see what God is doing.

JAN 16-21

Monday	Read Isaiah 8:19-22. Do you think it is true that if you look for distress and darkness in life, you'll find it? Why or why not?
Tuesday	Read Isaiah 9:1-7. What helps you to trust in God's promises? What makes it difficult to trust?
Wednesday	Read Matthew 4:12-14. How do you think moving, after his cousin was arrested, affected Jesus and his path in life and ministry?
Thursday	Read Matthew 4:14-16. What does God's light look like and feel like when you've been in dark times in your life?
Friday	Read Matthew 4:17. What do you think it means for the kingdom of heaven to come near (NIV)?
Saturday	Read Matthew 13:31-33. What should we expect to experience when the kingdom of God is near to us?

CIRCLE Study Questions:

1. Describe a time when someone helped you see a situation from a new perspective, or when you were able to see something in a situation that others didn't see?
2. How can you intentionally cultivate a deep and profound relationship with the Holy Spirit inside you?
3. How does being in tune with the Holy Spirit working in you help you to see the world through a different lens? Can you think of an example?
4. How would you describe the kingdom of heaven coming near?
5. What is the difference between ministry with the light of Jesus shared in bright places, and a ministry with the light of Jesus carried to dark places?

FaithFit Challenge:

In moments of stress, anxiety, or discomfort this week, close your eyes and silently offer the following prayer: "Holy Spirit, help me see." Then open your eyes and pay attention to what God shows you. At the end of each day, share in person with a friend or family member, or journal, what you experienced and any ways you witnessed the kingdom of heaven coming near.

CHANGING THE WORLD

JAN 22

THE WORLD NEEDS YOU

Matthew 4:18-22

Jesus doesn't go to the Temple and pick the best and the brightest students looking for a rabbi to teach them. He goes to the working people who supply food for the region, finds them at work on their boats, and invites them right where they are to follow him. Those who say yes don't have to pass any tests, or prepare in any way. They simply step out in faith, willing to follow without even knowing the road ahead.

Jesus invites you as you are, from where you are, because God's world needs you for who you are.

JAN 23-28

Monday	Read Matthew 4:18. If Jesus were to find and call you from the "everyday" of your life, what would the scene look like?
Tuesday	Read Matthew 4:19. What does it mean to you to be taught to "fish for people" (NIV)?
Wednesday	Read Matthew 4:20. Could you leave your current life patterns and follow a new path, at once, if Jesus asked? Why or why not?
Thursday	Read Matthew 4:21-22. What do you need to leave behind to fully commit to following Jesus?
Friday	Read Philippians 4:14-19. Do you trust that if you risk following where Jesus leads, God will meet your needs? Why or why not?
Saturday	Read Ezekiel 22:23-31. In what ways does God invite us to see our role in God's creation?

CIRCLE Study Questions:

1. Pastor Brian shared that God doesn't need us, in the same way that we need God. Yet, God's creation is designed with a role for us to play. How does it feel to hear the words: "God's world needs you"?
2. What questions would you want to ask Jesus before you say yes to following Him? Why do you think those who first followed were willing to go "at once" (NIV)?
3. Pastor Brian described in his message the likelihood that the fishermen were under contract to the Roman empire. How is the invitation to follow Jesus a choice between the empire (the way of the world) and the kingdom of heaven (the way of Jesus)?
4. How do you sense Jesus is inviting you to follow right now? In what ways might following Jesus invite risk and or cause you to leave behind what is comfortable or safe?

FaithFit Challenge:

Set an alarm on your phone to alert you every afternoon. When it goes off, pause a moment and pray with the question, "How am I being invited to follow Jesus today?"

CHANGING THE WORLD

JAN 29

LET'S CHANGE THE WORLD TOGETHER

Matthew 4:23-25

As the introduction to Matthew's Gospel concludes and the Sermon on the Mount is about to begin, Matthew includes an important detail about how the movement grew. Word spread, and people brought those with needs to Jesus. Jesus was at the center of the movement, but He wasn't alone. Those who knew who Jesus was, who had experienced the healing power of His love, told others and brought others to Him.

We can change the world together by inviting people to meet Jesus.

JAN 30 - FEB 4

Monday	Read Matthew 4:23. As the body of Christ today, how is the church "teaching", "proclaiming the kingdom", and "healing" as Jesus did (NIV)?
Tuesday	Read Matthew 4:24. In what ways do we bring people to Jesus today?
Wednesday	Read Matthew 4:25. How can we help the news of what Jesus offers spread well beyond "church people"?
Thursday	Read John 1:40-45. Who do you know that you'd like to introduce to Jesus, or to invite into a deeper relationship with Jesus?
Friday	Read Luke 5:17-20. What lengths are you willing to go in order to bring someone in need to an encounter with Jesus?
Saturday	Read Hebrews 10:19-25. How can being part of a church community inspire and encourage us to change the world together?

CIRCLE Study Questions:

1. Pastor Brian shared that changing the world begins with one moment, one encounter, and one life at a time. How have you witnessed the love of Jesus transforming a life?
2. Have you ever brought someone to an encounter with Jesus? If so, describe the experience. If not, who first helped you to encounter the love of Jesus?
3. In the message on Sunday, we heard that the first to follow Jesus didn't just experience change in their own life. They advocated for the needs of others, inviting others to experience the healing and hope they found in Jesus. How are we, the church, advocating for the needs of others today, and how are we introducing others to Jesus?
4. How can you be part of changing the world? Do you find the invitation exciting, or daunting, or something else?

FaithFit Challenge:

Set aside some time this week for prayer. As you pray, reflect on this question: How have you experienced the love of Jesus changing the world. Write or record in some way an answer to the question.