

Third Sunday after Epiphany

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 9:1-4

For to Us a Child Is Born

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. 2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. 3 You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. 4 For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

9:1 no gloom – Verse 1 looks back to the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom, which included two of the northern-most tribes, Zebulun and Naphtali in 722-721 B.C. In 701 B.C., the southern kingdom and Jerusalem itself were threatened by the Assyrian king, Sennacherib. Although spared at this time, Judah would eventually fall to the Babylonians almost a century and half later as Isaiah warns. With the north in captivity, Jerusalem threatened, and eventual exile certain, a cloud of darkness hung over Jerusalem and Judah, because their sins, especially their apostasy from Yahweh. In that context Isaiah's words of hope, "There will be no more gloom for those who are in distress," were greatly needed and should have been welcome.

her. The people of God who turn to Him. (TLSB)

former time. When the Assyrians attacked the Northern Kingdom of Israel. (TLSB)

Naphtali. This tribe in northern Israel suffered greatly when the Assyrian Tiglath-Pileser III attacked in 734 and 732 B.C. (2Ki 15:29). (CSB)

Hereditary lands of these two tribes constituted Israel's northern border west of the Jordan. (TLSB)

latter time. Still in the future for Isaiah. This was fulfilled by Christ's ministry in Galilee. (TLSB)

made glorious...Galilee. Fulfilled when Jesus ministered in Capernaum—near the major highway from Egypt to Damascus, called the "way of the sea" (Mt 4:13–15). (CSB)

The area identified by the prophet was the tribal territories of Zebulun and Naphtali – the area of the NT Galilee. This area was an invasion corridor often used by armies throughout Israel's history. Syria and Israel fought over the territory. Invading armies from the north, including the armies of Assyria and Babylon, trampled the area. It was often humbled by the struggle of nations. (PBC)

Here again we see a contrast. The same territory where the feet of invading soldiers trampled every hope and left nothing but gloom and distress would be the scene of a bright future. God had chosen this area for special honor. Through the centuries, believers hoped God would honor the northern portions of Palestine. Interestingly, Jewish rabbis taught that redemption would appear in Galilee. And it came. The feet of the Messiah walked there and brought hope, joy and peace. When Jesus returned from His

temptations in the wilderness, He began His ministry in Galilee. After Matthew identifies the place, “by the lake in the area of Zebedee and Bethsaida” (Matthew 4:13), he cites this passage. (PBC)

That land to the north, the district of the heathen was regarded with disdain by the proud Judeans. Already at that time Judah was viewing the kingdom of Samaria, the kingdom of the ten tribes, as being inferior, totally, except for the outer portions of that kingdom, where the boundary between Israel and the heathen had been eliminated. And now a grievous judgment from God had overtaken that land of Galilee, while Judah had been spared. In consequence it was now possible for proud Judah to look with disdain upon those Galileans as being rejected by God and to brag about itself as being God’s true people, as though it were lacking nothing. But Judah should be aware of what God was going to do in the final era. Judah, at the time so self-assured, will, because it scorned the prophetic Word and testimony, be driven into outer darkness. It will be swallowed by a darkness so intense that no light of day will ever touch it. (8:19, 22) On the other hand, that despised and so deeply demoralized Galilee will in that day once more acquire a position of honor. It is now night there, but after this night the dawning of salvation will brighten things up. (see maps of tribes and Jesus’ ministry. (Stoeckhardt)

way of the sea – This was where there was intercourse and trade with the Jews. This is called *Galilee of the nations*. Moreover, Isaiah speaks of the light of happiness and peace. Matthew, however, speaks of Christ (Matt. 4:14 ff.); he quotes the text from the Septuagint, not according to the Hebrew, and he turns the specific prophecy into a general one, as he often does elsewhere. (Luther)

East-west road through Zebulun, Naphtali, and Galilee, which then runs southward along the Great Sea. (TLSB)

land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. Region east of the Jordan, occupied by various peoples. Because the invading enemy came from the north, these outlying districts would be the first to fall victim to the conqueror’s might and the last to be freed from his domination. (TLSB)

9:2 *people ... darkness*. All people walking in darkness without God’s salvation. (TLSB)

great light. Jesus and his salvation would be a “light for the Gentiles” (42:6; 49:6). ((CSB)

The light that will appear is the presence of the Lord (cf 10:17; Jn 8:12). (TLSB)

Isaiah 42:6 “I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.”

Isaiah 49:6 “he says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”

This prophecy has been literally fulfilled, just as the evangelist Matthew authenticates in 4:12, `7. When the time had come that Christ should be revealed to Israel, He came into Galilee, in the district of Zebulun and Naphtali. There, in the region around Capernaum, on the populated strip of coastline on the Sea of Galilee, He began to preach about the kingdom of heaven and confirmed this preaching through great signs and wonders. He then preached the Gospel also in the other cities and areas of Galilee and in mercy visited also the land beyond the sea, beyond the Jordan. (Luke 15) Not in Judah-Jerusalem but in despised Galilee of the Gentiles Jesus initially manifested His glory. (Stoeckhardt)

9:3 *multiplied the nation* – Here is pictured the fruit and power of this light which is propagated from day to day, not satisfied with the corner where the Jews live but spread abroad among the nations throughout

the world, a thing that irks the Jews. In Deut. 32:21 we read: “I will provoke them with a foolish nation.” The Jews, who think that they alone should be God’s people, interpret this passage in a distorted way, as if the Gentiles, however numerous, would not come to enjoy God nor rejoice in Him. But this is the true meaning: Many nations are received into the kingdom of God; this makes the Jews sick, by this they are provoked to anger, envy, zeal, and a spirit of stupor (cf. Rom. 11:8). This is what it means to lessen their joy. (Luther)

In spirit the prophet sees how the great light that dawns upon heathen Galilee sends its rays out farther and farther and brightens the entire area of the heathen, which is shrouded in darkness. God first gathers for Himself a people in Galilee, a people that is His people, and this people then increases by the addition of the heathen. Upon Galilee dawned the day of the NT. In Galilee was the beginning of the NT church. And this beginning of God’s kingdom in the district of the heathen indicated just in heathen lands the kingdom of God was to continue its course. Similarly in 26:15 Isaiah speaks about the wonderful enlargement of the nation and about an expansion that wins the people from the ends of the earth. The fulfillment corresponds exactly to the prophecy. The Galilean circle of disciples was the beginning of the NT church. These disciples then went out into all the world and preached to all nations the Gospel of Christ, the Light and Salvation of the world, and by this preaching a great people has in the course of time been gathered from the heathen. (Stoeckhardt)

joy at the harvest – Harvest is a time of rejoicing. A bountiful harvest ensures survival and prosperity. (TLSB)

divide the spoil – As the victors in battle. (TLSB)

The metaphors are taken from agricultural and military life. Christ, too, uses the former in John 4:35. There are many dangers before the harvest, there are many before the war is over. Therefore farmers rejoice in the harvest, and soldiers rejoice when they divide the spoil taken in the war. Read Judges 7, about the Midianites cut down through Gideon. They slaughtered each other with their own swords. In such a manner, says Isaiah, will the nations be redeemed. (Luther)

The two comparisons above also emphasize the grace of God. While the workers sweat to bring in the harvest, they have done nothing to cause the crop to grow and mature. That only God can do. He sends rain and sunshine. In the other comparison, Isaiah cites the day of Midian’s defeat. With three hundred men, Gideon defeated an army of Midianites and their allies, which the writer of Judges describes as “thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore” (7:12). God had sifted the Israelite army from 32,000 to 300 so that the victory could clearly be one that God gave to His people. It was a gift of His grace, not the result of their own strength and strategy. (PBC)

9:4 *broken as on the day of Midian*. Gideon defeated the hordes of Midian and broke their domination over Israel (Jdg 7:22–25). (CSB)

This relates to when Gideon defeated the Midianites with only 300 men. This was a battle and victory without the use of the sword, without man being involved. The situation in the final period will be similar. Then God will again, without sword and might, without humans having anything to do with it, in a miraculous way, break the enemy’s oppressive dominion and free His people from the hand of its enemy. In this context the prophet is describing in general terms the salvation of the NT. (Stoeckhardt)

The people of whom the prophet is speaking here, who according to V. 3 are enjoying the treasures of salvation, according to V. 7 the blessings of Christ’s reign of peace, are called God’s people of the NT. Redemption is indeed universal, yet it is the believers who share in the fruit and effect of the same. Thus is read in 1:27 that Jerusalem, and it is those who are converted, should be redeemed with justice and

righteousness. Thus it reads in Acts 20:28 that God has purchased the church with His own blood. (Stoeckhardt)

The torch of Gideon is the light of the Gospel, so is the sound of the trumpet, and the clash of jars is Christ's crucifixion (cf. Judges 7:16). These are the things that overcome those enemies: the Word and the Holy Spirit in the Word preaching Christ as having died for us, etc. We draw no sword, but we only shout, hear, believe, confess: Christ died for us, etc. "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory, etc." (1 Cor. 15:57). (Luther)

yoke. In 10:26–27 Isaiah predicts that God will destroy the Assyrian army and their oppressive yoke. This was fulfilled in 701 B.C. (see 37:36–38). (CSB)

Tools of enslavement. Yokes controlled animals and prisoners. A staff and rod brought discipline. (TLSB)

This is what the people bore as load and burden. (Stoeckhardt)

staff – The staff of his shoulder. This is the staff that struck the shoulder, the neck of the people. (Stoeckhardt)

rod – This is actually the rod of the one who oppressed or enslaved the people. (Stoeckhardt)

The most oppressive tyrant is the Law, which the prophet here calls our judge and king. It dictates: "You shall love God," etc. But no one is without evil desire. By nature all hate God and the things that are of God. This is not felt except in temptation. The whipped son is angry with his parent. No one likes discipline, not even God's. Natural man would prefer that there be no law, because he is not able to perform what it demands. The sin that has been committed is the second tyrant, and it brings forth the third, namely, death and damnation. Who could be happy when he is answerable to these three? But now they have been vanquished, the Law is fulfilled by Christ and then also by us who have been endowed by the Holy Spirit. He adds the courage so that we may glory even in our sufferings (Rom. 5:3), and thus the Law is no longer outrageous in its dictates but an agreeable companion. The Law itself indeed is not changed, but we are. Obviously this is Christian liberty, when the Law is voluntarily fulfilled, so that it cannot accuse, demand, and render guilty. Where the conscience is not guilty, where there is no sin because it is forgiven, there is no power of death but peace of conscience, the certainty of eternal life. (Luther)

Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Notes for Matthew 11:28-30 follow below:

11:28 WEARY AND BURDENED – This means the anxiety and terrors of sin and death. We tire ourselves out trying to save ourselves by our own doing.

The people were burdened by the "yoke of the law" of which the rabbis spoke. They could not meet its demands with its many regulations and restrictions. Jesus invites everyone struggling with sin and the burden of the Law to come to him for rest and refreshment. He was keeping the Law in their stead and would bear their sins in his own body on the tree of the cross.

Those who acknowledge their sinfulness and realize that it is a burden too heavy for them to bear, that this load will drag them down to hell if they must bear it by themselves – they are ones to whom Jesus promises rest. It is his gift.

11:29 TAKE MY YOKE – Jesus does not promise us immunity from family, social, academic, economic and political problems. He does not promise us a Utopia. He does promise rest for the soul, freedom from the guilt and power of sin, freedom from the threat of death, freedom from the power of the devil. His yoke of discipleship is easy to wear and his burden of service to others is light.

The yoke Jesus asks us to take upon ourselves might be defined as the whole Christian life and hope. Once we have assumed that yoke, God's commandments are no longer a heavy burden that weighs us down and destroys us. Instead, they are expressions of God's will in which we delight, for we look for ways to express our thanks to God for the blessings of his grace.

11:29 WILL FIND REST – It is not easy to be a consistent believer in Christ Jesus, finding one's rest only in that Gospel because the people of the world are constantly accusing Christians of stressing the wrong thing.

How comforting these words are to us! Weighed down by unrealistic expectations, heavy responsibilities, and nagging guilt of sins committed and imagined, we cannot bear life's demands. Admitting our false sense of wisdom and our failure to shoulder our own burdens, we hear the voice of the Savior.

11:30 MY BURDEN IS LIGHT – Jesus is not saying that life is easy, but afflictions, the cross and suffering simple drive Christian closer to Jesus.

Crosses we are called upon to bear on account of our loyalty to our Savior are faith-strengthening experiences, for they help us to understand what Christ endured for us, and we have our Lord's promise that he will give us the strength to endure them and that he will make them channels for all kinds of blessings. The more faithfully we follow Christ, the easier his yoke and the lighter his burden becomes.

We take his yoke upon us joyfully, seeking ways to serve him in home, neighborhood, church, and vocation. We receive his rest that refreshes us for daily service and await the rest which belongs to the people of God.

Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Ephesians 2:10 is doable because it follows Ephesians 2:8-9.

Ephesians 2:8-9, "8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast."

day of Midian. God's coming deliverance is compared to the victory of Gideon, who freed the northern tribes of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali (Jgs 6:35) also by means of a "great light." Their defeat by a handful of Israelites is cited as evidence that mighty foes must fail when they oppose the kingdom God promises to establish. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Divisions in the Church

10 I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. 11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. 12 What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. 16 (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

1:10 *I appeal to you* – παρακαλέω ... διὰ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ—Cf. BAGD, s.v. παρακαλέω, 2: “appeal to, urge, exhort, encourage.” The verb can also mean to “comfort” or “cheer up.” Paul will use this verb later in 4:13, 16; 14:31; 16:12, 15, where its meaning ranges from “to answer in a kind manner” even when the Christian is persecuted (4:13), to when Paul “strongly urged” the unwilling Apollos to travel to Corinth (16:12). Regarding the use of διὰ with the genitive. Paul used a similar construction in the preceding verse, δι’ οὗ in 1:9, to say that the Corinthians had been called into communion and unity by God. (CC p. 39)

Just as Isaiah’s words of comfort are based on God’s new act of salvation (“Comfort, comfort my people ... her iniquity is pardoned,” Is 40:1–2), so Paul’s appeal to the saints is based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As an apostle he could make his weight felt and issue commands (as he will do in, for example, 1 Cor 4:16; 5:7; 6:18; 7:12–13; 10:14; 11:28; 14:37; 16:1). But he prefers the pastoral approach of encouraging his flock in keeping with his role as their father in the faith (1 Cor 4:15; see also 1 Thess 2:7; Philemon 8–9). This Gospel-based comfort, now recorded in the Scriptures for subsequent generations of Christians, is filled with the power of the Spirit to build up the church. The edification or upbuilding of the church will be a prominent theme of the epistle. (CC p. 39)

brothers. In Christ believers have a unity similar to that of blood brothers and sisters. Paul is referring to both men and women (see 16:20; Ro 16:3, 6–7, 12–13, 15). (CSB)

But apart from the linguistic convention of the time, there seems to be a further reason for Paul’s use of ἀδελφοί rather than “brothers and sisters.” Paul describes to the Galatians how God sent his Son (υἱός) to redeem us so that all Christians might receive adoption as sons (υἱοθεσία), and God also sent “the Spirit of his Son” into our hearts, enabling us to cry “Abba, Father.” Thus, he continues, every Christian is no longer a slave but a son and heir (Gal 4:4–7; cf. Rom 8:14, 19). (CC p. 40)

In the ancient Near East, generally sons, and not daughters, were the heirs, though there were a couple of exceptions in the OT (Num 27:1–11; Job 42:13–15. (CC p. 40)

With the Spirit of God’s Son in our hearts, all Christians are being “conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8:29–30). Thus according to NT terminology, all Christians, whether men, women, or children, are “brothers” by virtue of their common sonship in Christ, the Son. (CC p. 40)

name of our Lord Jesus Christ – Paul turns now to address the first big issue of the epistle: the need to restore the church’s unity. This topic will be his chief concern throughout the first four chapters (1:10–4:21). While he can sometimes be stern (4:21!), the chief basis of his appeal is the Gospel of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, whose name the Corinthians call upon (1:2). Their faith and fellowship in Christ, he points out, have clear implications for their unity. (CC p. 42)

The Corinthians had been called into communion with Christ (1:9). Paul now urges them to maintain that unity. Calling them “brothers,” a term he will use thirty-nine times in the epistle, his appeal comes to them “by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:10), the one name that should completely overshadow any party names and loyalties. After all, this was the name into which they had been baptized. Paul is here, no doubt, anticipating the baptismal argument in 1:13. The Corinthians belong to Christ and only to Christ, for they have been baptized in his name, not the name of Paul or anyone else. (CC pp. 42-43)

It had become apparent that the Corinthians, proud of their intellectual ability, delighted in debating with one another, taking a variety of positions on issues like sexuality and marriage, food laws, spiritual gifts, and the role of women in worship. Paul’s plea for unity does not mean he envisaged a colorless uniformity, with no room for individual insights and accents. On the other hand, neither would he have condoned the principle of “reconciled diversity,” the pluralism in doctrine and practice endorsed by the modern ecumenical movement. That would not be compatible with saying the same thing. Paul is pleading for a “great consensus” in the church, so that the congregation will glorify God “with one voice” (Rom 15:6) and be eager to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3; cf. Ps 133:1; Jn 17:17–21). (CC p. 43)

Paul’s exhortation here invokes “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul began this epistle by defining Christians as those who call upon Jesus’ name (1:2). A few verses later Paul will remind the Corinthians that they were not baptized into the name of Paul (1:13, 15), but into Jesus Christ. Jesus’ instructions were for Baptism into the one name (ὄνομα, singular) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19), but in Acts trinitarian Baptism is simply called Baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38; 10:48) or “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16; 19:5). The connection between Christian Baptism and calling on the name of Jesus is expressed in the exhortation of Ananias to Saul: “stand up and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling upon his [Jesus’] name” (Acts 22:16). Thus Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians appeals to the very foundation of their faith and their defining identity as those who have been baptized into Jesus’ name and who call upon his name in faith. Baptism and the invocation of Jesus’ name created their unity and are the basis of Paul’s appeal that their unity be restored. (CC pp. 39-40)

Acts 4:12 “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

no divisions – Thus there should be “no factions” in the congregation. The word σχίσμα (“faction”) may mean a “tear” in a garment (Mk 2:21). Although the congregation is not yet so divided that Paul cannot address the Corinthians as a unified whole, it seems they are on the verge of being torn apart. Like his Lord in the high priestly prayer, Paul is concerned that they should “continue to be one” (Jn 17:21, 23). They should not let their loyalty to their favorite leaders rend the community any further. (CC p. 43)

Eph. 4:3, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Psalms 133:1, “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!”

John 17:21, “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

John 17:23, “I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

united in the same mind – Continuing his appeal, Paul urges the Corinthians to be “restored to the same mind and the same conviction” (1 Cor 1:10). The verb “restore” (καταρτίζω) is used for the

mending of fishing nets (Mk 1:19). The Corinthians are to “patch things up” among themselves, let themselves “be restored” to their former harmonious condition (cf. 2 Cor 13:11: καταρτίζεσθε, “mend your ways,” RSV). (CC p. 43)

With repetition, Paul emphasizes the main point of his Letter. Christian unity depends on faithfulness to Christ, not chasing one’s own agendas or ideas. In Php 2:1–11, Paul gives the ultimate example of sacrificing self-interest, encouraging single-mindedness among the Christians. “Both our churches and our schools should persevere in the pure doctrine of God’s Word and in that longed-for and godly oneness of mind” (Preface to the Christian Book of Concord, *Concordia*, 5). (TLSB)

Philippians 2:1-11: “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

1:11 *Chloe’s people* – Christian travelers, perhaps pursuing business on Chloe’s behalf. (TLSB)

Χλόης—Chloe’s name means “green,” or perhaps “sprouting” or “blooming.” It is related to the adjective χλωρός, used to describe green plants (Mk 6:39; Rev 8:7) and the pale color of a sick person or, in the book of Revelation (6:8), the horse ridden by Death. The corn-goddess Demeter (the Romans called her Ceres) was known as “Chloe Demeter.” Her lowly name may indicate that Chloe was an emancipated slave. (CC p. 41)

Paul does not say “it was *reported* to me ... that there are quarrels among you,” but “it was *made clear* to me ... by Chloe’s people” (1 Cor 1:11). One commentator remarks on the way Paul models a wise pastoral approach in naming “the source of his information. He is not entertaining idle rumors which do so much damage in the church before their evil buzzing can be finally quieted.” His informants may have been Chloe’s relatives or her servants. Chloe herself was almost certainly a Christian or at least sympathetic to the church. Whether she lived in Corinth or Ephesus is not indicated. (CC pp. 43-44)

have reported to me – Chloe’s people had informed Paul that there were “quarrels” (1:11) among the Corinthians. The word “quarrels” (ἔριδες) is almost synonymous with “factions” (σχίσματα) in 1:10. The presence of quarreling and jealousy was a sign that the Corinthians were still “fleshly” people (σαρκικοί, 3:3), controlled by their unregenerate human nature. Paul’s list of “the works of the flesh” in Gal 5:19–20 includes “quarreling” (ἔρις; NRSV strife) and closely related sins like “enmities ... jealousy, anger, and selfish ambition” (ἐριθεία, i.e., self-promoting factionalizing). Anyone who habitually indulged in these sins was in danger of forfeiting his share in God’s kingdom (Gal 5:21). (CC p. 44)

quarreling. See Gal 5:19; Jas 4:12. (CSB)

1:12 I follow – These leaders did not intend to attract loyalty to themselves, but groups arose with an allegiance to each. Paul was the first missionary, and perhaps his teaching was regarded as most authentic. (TLSB)

The regrettable tendency to quarreling had become widespread in Corinth. Most unfortunate was the egotism which Paul brings out by the four-times repeated “I” (ἐγώ): “I belong to Paul,” “I belong to Apollos,” “I belong to Cephas,” “I belong to Christ” (1:12). (CC)

Paul seems to have listed the factions according to the importance he ascribes to each “leader,” beginning with himself as least important and ending with Christ. It is clear that none of these “leaders” encouraged the development of a faction around himself. What is not so clear is the motivation that led to the formation of each group. (CC p. 44))

A significant group seems to have stood by Paul as the church’s founding father who had labored among them for a year and a half (Acts 18:11). They believed he should be held in honor as the first missionary to have reached them. They may also have preferred his more direct and unpretentious style of teaching. But Paul disapproves of this group as much as the others. As he perceives, the Paul-people are not motivated by concern for the truth of the Gospel. Rather, in a self-interested and boastful fashion, they are busy forming a personality cult around the apostle, just as the other groups for their own selfish purposes are putting Apollos or Cephas or “Christ” on a pedestal. (CC p. 44)

After Paul had planted the church in Corinth, Apollos, the gifted and eloquent Alexandrian, was encouraged by the church in Ephesus to travel to Achaia (Greece). “On his arrival he greatly helped those who by grace had believed” (Acts 18:27). Apollos was thus honored as the one who “watered” what Paul had planted in Corinth (1 Cor 3:6). By comparison with Apollos’ rhetorical skills, Paul’s preaching seemed—to some at least—unimpressive and simplistic (2:1–3; 2 Cor 10:10; 11:6). (CC p. 45)

According to B. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 176, nn. 143–44, it seems clear from Acts 18:24–28 “that Apollos is trained in rhetoric and makes use of it during his ministry in Corinth.” The expressions ἀνὴρ λόγιος (“an eloquent man,” Acts 18:24), δύνάτος (“powerful,” Acts 18:24), and ἐπιδείκνυμι (“to demonstrate,” Acts 18:28) all have rhetorical connotations. (CC p. 45)

But there is no suggestion that Apollos ever encouraged the formation of a faction bearing his name. All the evidence indicates that he and Paul worked in harmony (cf. 16:12, where Paul informs them he has been urging his “brother” Apollos to pay them another visit). (CC p 45))

The “Paul” and “Apollos” factions may have been the largest. Certainly the dispute between them seems to have weighed most heavily on Paul’s mind. In chapters 3 and 4 he returns to the question of a proper evaluation of the role of Apollos and himself (3:4–9; 4:6). But the “Cephas” and “Christ” groups are not mentioned again. (CC p. 45)

The group that had formed around Cephas is more difficult to account for than the Paul and Apollos groups. It is possible that Cephas had made a personal visit to Corinth accompanied by his wife, for the Corinthians were familiar with his habit of taking his wife along on his travels (9:5). If the church had been host to both Peter and his wife, this would more readily explain some members’ attachment to him. But it is difficult to say whether the Corinthians knew about his travel habits from personal observation or simply from reports. It is also possible that some, especially those Corinthians who were Jewish-Christian in background, had been baptized by Peter, and on that basis had formed a personal attachment to him. Some of these Jewish Christians may have arrived in Corinth proudly carrying letters of recommendation from the chief apostle (cf. 2 Cor 3:1). But more than this we cannot say. There is not one piece of

evidence in the epistle that the Cephas group was a Judaizing faction upholding a stricter attitude to Jewish law, particularly food laws. (CC p. 45)

Finally, the “Christ” group is the most difficult to account for. Numerous theories have been advanced. One commentator gives a useful summary of the identifications that have been proposed: (CC p. 46)

Jews from Palestine who had known Jesus or his brother James; Judaizers, like those who infiltrated the Galatian churches; heretics at Corinth who refused to acknowledge any apostolic authority and who claimed direct communication with Christ through the Spirit; spiritualists or pneumatics (*pneuma* means Spirit) who could confess Christ but wanted to hear nothing of the human Jesus (see 12:3); or Gnostics (Knowers) who claimed special knowledge, freedom from authority, and all earthly leaders. A desperate solution by some is to strike the name Christ and replace it with Crispus (from [1:]14)! (CC)

What does seem certain is that the “Christ” faction was reacting against the other three. Rather than advocating any distinctive doctrine or practice, they may have been individuals proclaiming themselves to be weary of the bickering, and saying in a superior fashion, “a pox on all your houses; I belong to Christ.” On the other hand, their critical attitude toward their faithful pastors suggests that the Christ group may have seen themselves as a particularly “spiritual” group, claiming “to have direct spiritual access to Christ apart from any humanly mediated tradition.” Proud of their giftedness and their γνῶσις, “knowledge” (1:5), they may have been especially prone to a theology of glory in which there was little room for the crucified Christ and cruciform pastors. But one cannot belong to Christ while rejecting the apostolic ministry instituted by God himself. Thus Paul also opposes this group. (CC p. 46)

Apollos. He had carried on a fruitful ministry in Corinth (Ac 18:24–28; 19:1). (CSB)

His teaching may have been more advanced than Paul’s (cf 3:6). (TLSB)

Cephas. It has been suggested that those who followed Peter in Corinth were Jewish Christians. (CSB)

Aram for “Peter”; often associated with the Jewish origins of the faith, Peter may have carried particular authority as a follower of Jesus in His earthly ministry. (TLSB)

I follow Christ – The nature of the “Christ” party is not certain; the slogan disparaged believers, and so betrayed a partisan spirit. (TLSB)

1:13-17 Paul does not suggest that Corinthians were baptized in other people’s names. Such baptisms could lead to a cult of celebrity or new sects (cf Ac 19:3, “John’s baptism”). (TLSB)

1:13 *Is Christ divided?* See 12:12–13. (CSB)

Rhetorical, sarcastic questions. Paul indicates that loyalty to him is misplaced; he is but a messenger and servant. (TLSB)

Paul’s response to the news from Chloe’s people begins with three rhetorical questions: “Is Christ divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?” (1:13). Paul asks incredulously whether Christ could possibly have been divided into competing factions. Could there possibly be a separate Pauline Christ, another Apollos Christ, a Petrine Christ, and an unmarked Christ? To ask the question is to answer it; the idea is preposterous! Obviously the Lord Jesus is one

indivisible person. And just as his person cannot be fragmented, so it is inconceivable that his body, the church, should be factionalized. (CC p. 47)

into my name. Implies becoming a follower or intimate associate. (CSB)

Taking only his own party to task, and allowing the other groups to fill in the blanks, Paul shows the absurdity of their position: “Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?” Now, for the first time in this letter, he points to the pivotal role of Christ’s crucifixion and of Baptism into Christ and Christ’s name as the appropriation of Christ’s death. From the beginning, the heart of the Gospel preached to the Corinthians had been “Christ died for our sins” (15:3). In the light of their faith in Christ crucified, how could they make so much of Paul or any other minister of the Gospel? After all, they had not been purchased by the blood of Paul; they were not Paul’s property. The great foundation of their faith remained Jesus Christ and him crucified (2:2; 3:11). (CC p. 47)

Baptism in the name of Jesus was the other foundational event in the life of the church. Through Baptism, the believers had appropriated the salvation Christ won on the cross. Thus it was absurd for the Paul faction to idolize Paul as if their salvation and identity were to be found in him. (CC p. 47)

1:14 *I baptize none of you* – Naturally, Paul did not approach his work in Corinth with the intention of baptizing as few people as possible. However, in retrospect he is grateful to God for his providence in not letting him baptize more families than he did. As Bengel comments: “The Providence of God reigns often in events, of which the reason is afterwards discovered.” (CC p. 48)

God had seen to it that Paul baptized only Crispus and Gaius. Crispus was the synagogue official who had been one of Paul’s early converts in Corinth, believing in the Lord “with his whole household” (Acts 18:8). Presumably Paul baptized the whole family, but here he only mentions Crispus as the family’s head. (CC p. 48)

The name Crispus is Latin. It has been suggested that he may have been a Roman citizen and therefore belonged to a family of colonists who had settled in Corinth (D. Gill, “Achaia,” *The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman Setting*, ed. D. Gill and C. Gempf, 451). G. Theissen, *Social Setting*, 69–119, argues that Crispus belonged to Corinth’s upper classes (cf. G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 62, n. 70). An important criterion for the election of an ἀρχισυνάγωγος, “leader of a synagogue” (Acts 18:8), was his capacity to bestow benefactions on the synagogue community (B. Blue, “Acts and the House Church,” *The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman Setting*, ed. D. Gill and C. Gempf, 176). (CC p. 48)

Gaius is probably the man Paul describes in his epistle to the Romans (written from Corinth) as “my host and the host of the whole church” (Rom 16:23). His full name may have been Gaius Titius Justus. Titius Justus is mentioned in Acts as the God-fearing Gentile who welcomed Paul into his home after he had been driven from the synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:7). Like Crispus, then, he belonged to the first group of converts, and for that reason had been baptized by the apostle himself. He was **probably** a man of means, which made it possible for him to host the whole church. In this respect he and Crispus were different from most members of the Corinthian congregation (1 Cor 1:26–29). Gaius may have been one of the Roman freedmen who came to Corinth and made their wealth in commerce. (CC p. 48)

1:15 *baptized in my name* – Baptism is administered in the name of the triune God, thus in Jesus’ name. It means being buried and raised with Christ. The logical conclusion of the “divided Christ” mentality (cf v 13) would elevate the servants into Christ’s place, though they have nothing to offer of themselves. (TLSB)

1:16 household. Other examples of households being baptized are those of Cornelius (Ac 10:24, 48), Lydia (Ac 16:15) and the Philippian jailer (Ac 16:33–34). The term may include family members, servants or anyone who lived in the house. (CSB)

Gk *oikos*, “house”; all who lived there, including slaves and children. (TLSB)
οἶκος—Literally, this denotes a “house” or “household.” “The house was both a fellowship and a place of meeting.” In addition to the household of Stephanas, the NT mentions the households of Cornelius (Acts 11:14), Lydia (Acts 16:15), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31, 34), Crispus (Acts 18:8), Onesiphorus (2 Tim 1:16; 4:19), and Philemon (Philemon 2). The early church broke bread “by house” (Acts 2:46) and proclaimed the Gospel in the temple and in houses (Acts 5:42). Michel notes: “It is explicitly emphasized that the conversion of a man leads his whole family to the faith; this would include wife, children, servants and relatives living in the house.” Thus “the house and the family are the smallest natural groups in the total structure of the congregation.” It is likely that any infants and children were baptized when a family or household was baptized (Acts 16:15; 1 Cor 1:16; cf. Acts 18:8). (CC pp. 41-42)

Stephanas. Finally, Paul recalls “the family of Stephanas” (1:16). This family had been “the firstfruits of Achaia” (16:15). (CC p. 49)

They were noted for their significant service to the saints (16:15). Why then did Paul momentarily forget him, when Stephanas was with him at the time in Ephesus, together with the other members of the Corinthian delegation, Fortunatus and Achaicus (16:17)? One suggestion is that it may have been precisely because Stephanas was with Paul that Paul forgot him. Preoccupied with recalling names back in Corinth, Paul momentarily failed to consider the Corinthians who were in Ephesus. We might even imagine there may have been some amusement as Stephanas himself or one of the other delegates jogged Paul’s memory. After this lapse, Paul was not confident he had included everyone, so he adds, “Beyond that, I do not know if I baptized anyone else” (1:16). Keeping a tally of those he had baptized apparently was not high on his agenda. (CC p. 49)

I do not know – Paul confesses the weakness of his memory. For Paul, it was not important that he might have baptized, but that a person was baptized into Christ. (TLSB)

1:17 not ... to baptize. Paul is not minimizing baptism; rather, he is asserting that his God-given task was primarily to preach. Jesus (Jn 4:2) and Peter (Ac 10:48) also had others baptize for them. (CSB)

Jesus Himself did not baptize but entrusted this to others (Jn 4:1–2). As an apostle, Paul emphasized his calling to preach and to plant congregations. (TLSB)

to preach – Baptism had not been the apostle’s top priority, “for Christ did not send [him] to baptize but to preach the Gospel” (1:17). In the verb “sent” (ἀπέστειλεν) we hear an echo of the word “apostle” (ἀπόστολος). Christ’s commission to Paul had not placed Baptism as the major component. Jesus himself did not baptize; he entrusted baptizing to his disciples (Jn 4:1–2). The apostles Peter and John did not baptize the Samaritan converts; that had already been done by the deacon Philip (Acts 8:12–17). To say this is not to depreciate the Sacrament of Baptism and the gifts received there. The point is that the task of administering Baptism could be carried out by any of the apostles’ assistants. (CC p. 50)

On the other hand, the “elders” (pastors) whom Paul began to appoint from the time of his first missionary journey (Acts 14:23) had much more limited local responsibilities. Their duties have always included not only preaching but the administration of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. (CC p. 50)

Paul’s call and highest ambition in his role as apostle to the Gentiles was to preach the Gospel in places where Christ had never been named (Rom 15:20). His commission was transparochial. Thus his ministry

took him from province to province as he evangelized, taught, and exhorted the new converts until Christ was formed in them (Gal 4:19). With his broad responsibilities and extensive travels, it was impossible for him to attend to the ongoing pastoral care and administration of the Sacraments required in each place. As already noted, these local responsibilities he entrusted, from the beginning of his missionary journeys, to “elders” (pastors) appointed in each church (Acts 14:23). (CC p. 52)

In telling the Corinthians that Christ did not send him to baptize, it is clearly not Paul’s intention to encourage any disregard for the Sacraments or the regular pastoral ministry. His point, simply, is that baptizing was not the chief part of the specific charge of his apostolic office. (CC p. 52)

words of eloquent wisdom. Lit. “wisdom of speech.” Paul’s mission was not to couch the gospel in the language of the trained orator, who had studied the techniques of influencing people by persuasive arguments. (CSB)

Paul downplays his skills as a speaker. (TLSB)

Having praised preaching so highly, Paul hastens to add that the preacher should not rely on his “wisdom/cleverness of word” (σοφία λόγου, 1 Cor 1:17). His “way with words” may be a fine servant of the Gospel, if he employs it humbly to that end. But if he uses it to focus attention on his eloquence rather than the cross, then the good servant has become the bad master. (CC p. 51)

St. Augustine comments: A teacher should not think “that anything may be said better than that which is said truthfully; nor should the teacher serve the words, but the words the teacher. This is what the Apostle meant by ‘not in wisdom of speech, lest the cross of Christ be made void’ ” (*On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. [Prentice Hall, 1958] 165). (CC p. 51)

The expression σοφία λόγου includes the ability to communicate with charm and eloquence, a skill in which Paul did not excel, at least in comparison with Apollos. He had come to the Corinthians “in weakness and fear and much trembling” (2:3). While they granted that his letters were “weighty and strong,” they thought he had no presence in public and no ability as a speaker (2 Cor 10:10; 11:6). Their superficial judgments focused on the manner of his presentation rather than its substance. (CC p. 51)

emptied of its power – The Gospel stands on its own and is not strengthened by rhetoric or logic. However, a speaker may use these skills in service to the Gospel. (TLSB)

κενωθῇ—κενόω, related to the adjective κενός, “empty,” literally means to empty something of its contents or power, “destroy, render void, of no effect.” A false emphasis on sophisticated technique would rob the Gospel “of its offence and therewith of its divine force and efficacy to save.” Paul will use the adjective in 1 Cor 15:14 when he says that “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain [κενόν], and your faith is also in vain [κενή].” (CC p. 42)

Any reliance on human wisdom, whether in formulating arguments or in presenting them, would empty the cross of Christ of its power (1:17). For its power is in its weakness (cf. 2 Cor 12:9; 13:4). The failure to present the word of the cross in a straightforward manner robs that word of any opportunity to do its powerful work. All that the speaker has accomplished is to focus people’s attention on himself and his own ability with words. To this issue Paul will turn next. (CC)

1:10-17 Divisions in the Church are denial of the one Baptism into Christ, who was crucified for all. His faithful servants preach the Gospel and are not to become objects of unhealthy devotion. The Triune God alone is the object of our faith and hope..Grant us such faithful ministers, dear Lord, who baptize and preach in your name and authority. Amen

18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1:18 words of the cross – Key note for the Letter. “The Gospel ... preaches righteousness and gives the Spirit” (FC SD V 22). (TLSB)

Paul has been arguing that reliance on one’s skill as a speaker can rob the cross of Christ of its power. He now sets out to cure the Corinthians of their fascination with rhetoric. After all, they should know that no matter how well they dress up the word of the cross, the world will always find it unpalatable. For the world marches to a different drummer. Its enthusiasm always is for whatever seems attractive and successful. Its basic orientation is toward what has aptly been called “the theology of glory.” But now, in opposition to the world’s lust for glamour, success, and “image,” Paul sets forth “the word [the theology] of the cross” (1:18–25). Only that sobering word will provide the Corinthians with a basis for overcoming their divisions and restoring their fellowship in Christ. (CC p. 64)

“The Theology of Glory” and “The Theology of the Cross”

These expressions derive from Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation of 1518. In thesis 20, for example, Luther cites 1 Cor 1:21, 25, and continues: “It is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross. Thus God destroys the wisdom of the wise. ... For this reason true theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ.” He adds, then, in thesis 21: “God can be found only in suffering and the cross. ... It is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his good works unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God’s.” The *power* of God is visible in creation (Rom 1:18–32), but the *grace* of God can only be found in God’s Word and Sacraments, on the cross and in the Supper, which to the world appear weak and foolish. (CC pp. 64–65)

is folly – μωρία—The English word “moron” is derived from μωρός. (CC p. 62)

The Corinthians need to be realistic that “the word of the cross” will always be “foolishness to those who are being destroyed” (1 Cor 1:18). In itself, of course, the Gospel is not foolishness; only to those who are being destroyed is it foolishness. The world will always think Christians are wasting their time. There was a period when even Jesus’ mother and brothers thought he was “beside himself” (Mk 3:21). Many of his Jewish opponents claimed that he was insane (Jn 10:20). Later the Roman governor Festus charged Paul with insanity: “You are out of your mind, Paul! ... Too much learning is driving you insane!” (Acts 26:24). Through the centuries the message of the cross has drawn similar abuse from Christianity’s cultured and less-cultured despisers. In their view, Christians “are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:19). (CC p. 65)

So long has the cross been a centerpiece in churches that Christians can easily forget the shame and offensiveness it represented in the ancient world. Only criminals and recalcitrant slaves were crucified. Indeed, Matthew’s gospel portrays Jesus’ death as that of a slave worth thirty pieces of silver (Mt 26:15; cf. Ex 21:32), and Paul draws a connection between Jesus’ taking the form of a slave (μορφὴν δούλου) and dying the death of the cross (Phil 2:7–8). In short, as has been well said, “to assert that God himself accepted death in the form of a crucified Jewish manual worker from Galilee in order to break the power of death and bring salvation to all men could only seem folly and madness to men of ancient times.” (CC p. 65)

The cross of Christ is the action of God for us and our salvation (2 Cor 5:18-19). Its power (Rom 1:16-17) is not visible to empirical observations. It meets neither the demands nor the expectations of natural man. Seekers are not drawn to the cross; in fact, the cross is repugnant to unregenerate man and drives him away. Yet its power is at work in the Gospel call. Through the Gospel the Spirit overcomes our natural resistance and brings us to faith in Christ crucified. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 4)

to those who are perishing – Those who see only foolishness in the cross deny its power to save them from eternal destruction. (TLSB)

τοῖς μὲν ἀπολλυμένοις ... τοῖς δὲ σωζομένοις—In the middle voice ἀπόλλυμι means “perish, die,” especially “of eternal death” (BAGD 2 a α). English versions usually treat its participle as middle: “those who are perishing” (NRSV, NKJV, NIV). There are no NT passages where the verb is unambiguously passive. However, the parallelism with τοῖς σωζομένοις, which definitely is passive (“those who are being saved,” not the middle “those who are saving themselves”), suggests that here τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις is also passive: “those who are being destroyed [by God].” The passive sense is confirmed by its echo in 1:19, where God is the subject of the active verb: “I will destroy [ἀπολῶ] the wisdom of the wise.” (CC p. 61)

Both of the participles are in the present tense, and they derive their temporal sense from the present tense main verb, ἐστίν, which indicates that some are now in the process of being destroyed, while others are now being saved and are already on the way that will finally lead to their eternal salvation. For Paul, σωτηρία is mostly an eschatological term. Again, as in 1:7–8, the Last Day is in view. (CC p. 61)

power of God – The cross is the instrument of God’s salvation. (TLSB)

On the other hand, “to us who are being saved it [the word of the cross] is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18). Note that despite the divisions he has just deplored, Paul does not classify the Corinthians among those being lost. The words “to us” assure them that they and he are united as the blessed recipients of salvation. For them, as for him, the word of the cross is a “fragrance from life to life” (2 Cor 2:16). (CC pp. 65-66)

According to Pauline theology, believers are surrounded by salvation—past, present, and future. Having been saved by grace in the past (Eph 2:5, 8; cf. Rom 8:24; Titus 3:5), they are now day by day in the process of being saved (1 Cor 1:18; 15:2; 2 Cor 2:15), a process which continues until they are finally saved on the last day (Rom 5:9; 11:26). Above all, it is this sure hope of rescue from God’s wrath on the Last Day which lends the words “save” and “salvation” their color. (CC p. 66)

Our salvation is accomplished by “the power of God” effective in “the word of the cross” (1 Cor 1:18). The voice of the Gospel is not foolishness, but “the power of God for salvation” (Rom 1:16). Thus Paul’s ministry was “a demonstration of the Spirit and power” (1 Cor 2:4). Through his preaching, God established his kingdom “in power” (4:20). Hence Paul was not interested in how well his spiritually “inflated” opponents could talk, but in their power (4:19). While outwardly he and his coworkers appeared to be weak, he rejoiced in weakness and blessed God when there was no more room for self-reliance (2 Cor 1:8–9), for then he knew the power of Christ would rest on him (2 Cor 12:9–10; 13:4). (CC p. 66)

GOSPEL – Matthew 4:12-25

Jesus Begins to Preach

¹²Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴so 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—¹⁶the 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.” ¹⁷From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

4:12 *John had been put in prison.* See Mk 1:14. The reason for John’s imprisonment is given in 14:3–4. (CSB)

Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great and ruler of Galilee, imprisoned John for condemning his adulterous relationship with his brother’s wife (cf. 14:1-12). (TLSB)

Jesus emerges victorious from his battle in the desert with Satan (4:1–11). What does Matthew mention next? The arrest of John, God’s end-time voice in the desert! This news is not a complete surprise to Matthew’s readers/hearers, for they already know at least the Gospel’s basic message, as the proleptic mention of Judas as the one “who betrayed him” in 10:4 shows. Matthew is not written for “naive” readers who are hearing of Jesus and his work for the first time. Yet this opening dependent clause of 4:12 should have an impact on us as we read. John is the one spoken of in Isaiah 40 (Mt 3:1–3), and he is Elijah foretold in the prophet Malachi (Mal 3:23 [ET 4:5]; see Mt 11:14; 17:10–12; see also the commentary on Mt 3:4). He announces the coming of the Mightier One (Mt 3:11), and he participates with Jesus in fulfilling all righteousness (Mt 3:15). Jesus, announced by John, has emerged victorious from conflict with Satan. The progress of God’s reign in Christ, however, will not be triumphant in normal human terms. Violent men will seek to snatch away the reign of heaven in Christ (11:12). God’s royal ruling will show itself in strange vulnerability and weakness. This should catch our attention: *John* was handed over (4:12). (CC)

Withdrew into Galilee – Means that He had been there before. This same verb occurs at Matthew 14:13, after the Baptist’s death. Stoeckhardt says: “This removal of John from the scene of activity served Jesus as a suggestion from His heavenly Father to enter to the full extent upon His Messianic career.”

The Greek word can mean simply “departed” (2:12), with no idea of escape. As John’s ministry ended, Jesus’ began. (TLSB)

ἀκούσας δὲ ὅτι Ἰωάννης παρεδόθη ἀνεχώρησεν—The verb παρεδόθη in the ὅτι clause after the participle ἀκούσας is a good illustration of relative time with regard to participles and indirect discourse. Because the participle ἀκούσας (“hearing”) is aorist, it will normally be a step in time back from the main verb, ἀνεχώρησεν (“he departed”), which is aorist indicative. Using the English conjunction “after” in the translation of the participle ἀκούσας expresses this “step back in time” well enough: “Now after [Jesus] heard.” Since, then, the *relative* time of the participle is a kind of past tense, the translation of the verb παρεδόθη in the ὅτι clause has to be adjusted one further step back in time; hence even though παρεδόθη is an aorist indicative, it is translated as a pluperfect: “... heard that John *had been* handed over.” (CC)

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew from the region around the Jordan into Galilee, heading northward after his wilderness conflict with the Satan. The language of 4:12–14 strongly parallels the language of 2:22–23. This shows the connection between chapter 4 and chapter 2 as parts of the same major section of the Gospel (1:1–4:16). It also shows that Jesus himself will choose the times and ways to confront the evil men who seek to destroy or hinder the work of God’s gracious reign. (CC)

4:13 *leaving Nazareth* – katalipon means that He abandoned it as His home.

καὶ καταλιπὼν τὴν Ναζαρά—Matthew spells “Nazareth” Ναζαρά here but Ναζαρέτ in 2:23 and Ναζαρέθ in 21:11. Jesus’ original residence in Nazareth was for the purpose of fulfilling Scripture (2:22–23). It is noteworthy, then, that “after he had left Nazareth” (4:13) to dwell in another city, the purpose, once again, is to fulfill Scripture. (CC)

lived in Capernaum – katokasen means that He took up permanent residence in Capernaum.

Although not mentioned in the OT, it was evidently a sizable town in Jesus’ day. Peter’s house there became Jesus’ base of operations during his extended ministry in Galilee (see Mk 2:1; 9:33). A fifth-century basilica now stands over the supposed site of Peter’s house, and a fourth-century synagogue is located a short distance from it. (CSB)

Modern Tel Hum. Fishing village and important garrison on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Home of Peter (8:14) and also the town where Matthew collected taxes (9:9). Capernaum served as Jesus’ base of operations. (TLSB)

Most importantly, Jesus withdraws into Galilee and leaves Nazareth, his hometown, in order to take up residence in Capernaum by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali. This happens, Matthew tells his readers/hearers, in order to fulfill Isaiah’s words in Is 8:23–9:1 (ET 9:1–2). This OT citation, the fifth and final OT citation formula in the Gospel’s first major section, possesses a threefold significance for Matthew. (CC)

4:14 might be fulfilled – ἵνα πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ Ἡσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος—This is the fifth of Matthew’s ten OT fulfillment citation formulas. (CC)

4:15–16 Another Messianic prophecy from Isaiah. Jesus spent most of his public ministry “in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali” (v. 13), which is north and west of the Sea of Galilee. (CSB)

Two of Israel’s 12 tribes. Hippolytus: “The two peoples (were) being brought into one fold and under the hand of one chief shepherd, the good (Shepherd) by nature, that is Christ” (ANF 5:165). (TLSB)

4:15 *land of Zebulun...Naphtali...beyond the Jordan* – γῆ Ζαβουλὼν ... Γαλιλαία τῶν ἐθνῶν—All these nominatives, from “land of Zebulun” through “Galilee of the Gentiles,” stand in apposition to the subject of the verb, which doesn’t occur until 4:16: ὁ λαός, “the people that was sitting in darkness.” The verb is εἶδεν, “saw a great light.” This is quite different from the grammar of the MT, in which “land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali” are not subjects, but direct objects of a prior verb (לָצַח, God “dishonored, belittled” them), which Matthew’s citation does not include. (CC)

ὁδὸν θαλάσσης—In the MT, “way of the sea” is the object of the verb מְגַלֵּל, “he [God] glorified.” However, both Matthew and the LXX lack a Greek equivalent for the MT’s verb. In Matthew, the phrase has to be taken adverbially. It is an adverbial accusative of extent, answering the question “How far?”⁵ Therefore, the translation renders it “as far as the way of the sea.” (CC)

It was in and around Galilee that Jesus spent most of his life on earth. The land of Zebulun was west of the Sea of Galilee and was bounded on the north by the land of Naphtali. The region toward the sea was the west of these, and extended from north and south along the Mediterranean. Beyond the Jordan indicates the territory east of the Jordan (Perea – location of Luke 15 ministry). For centuries those living in this large territory had been exposed to political and military aggression from the north (Syria, Assyria etc) and to the corrosive moral and religious influences of a pagan environment. Many of the inhabitants

had been deported. The people of Galilee were a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, pagan people, by and large. (CC)

In the first place, Matthew declares here that Isaiah's promise of future deliverance and blessing for the northern regions of Israel (the tribal areas of Zebulun and Naphtali), which were ravaged by the Assyrian invaders in the eighth century BC and by others since, has now come true in Jesus. (CC)

Galilee had a significant Gentile population. Here in despised Galilee, light dawned. (TLSB)

4:16 *the people* – laos – This reminds us that Covenant people still lived among them but it includes also the Gentiles.

Dwelling – hamenos (sitting) denotes the spiritual stupor of the people.

In darkness – skotos – This denotes the hopeless condition of natural man, sunken in ignorance, unbelief and sin.

ὁ λαὸς ὁ καθήμενος ἐν σκότει—Matthew uses the participle of κάθημαι, “sitting,” which cannot really be a translation for the MT's participle, הֹלְכִים, “the people *going/walking*” (Is 9:1 [ET 9:2]). The LXX is a true translation of the MT with ὁ λαὸς ὁ πορευόμενος, “the people *going*.” Matthew has translated as if the Hebrew had a participle of שָׁבַע, “sit; live.” (CC)

have seen – eidev – They actually realized that He was the great Light.

A great light – phos – This great light reminds us of the Gospel of John, where Jesus is called the Light in the darkness of the world.

In the second place, the promised light will shine in the darkness for those in “Galilee of the Gentiles” (4:15). This probably refers to both Jews and Gentiles living in this northern region of the Holy Land, but the explicit mention of τὰ ἔθνη (“the Gentiles/nations,” 4:15) surely invites a connection with 28:16–20, and to that connection I shall return below. (CC)

In the third place, and perhaps most importantly for Matthew's Gospel, Is 8:23–9:1 (ET 9:1–2) is part and parcel of *another Immanuel passage*, Is 8:23–9:6 (ET 9:1–7). Matthew had cited Isaiah's first Immanuel passage in Mt 1:22–23. Now Matthew's citation of Is 8:23–9:1 (ET 9:1–2) casts beams from its larger context upon the narrative of Jesus, “God is with us” (Mt 1:23). Light has dawned in Galilee (Is 8:23–9:1 [ET 9:1–2]); the joy of the nation in victory over her enemies is greater than the joy at harvest or when dividing the spoils of battle (9:2–4 [ET 9:3–5]). Why is this so? “For a child is born to us, a son is given to us, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Is 9:5 [ET 9:6]). The “Son of David” (Mt 1:1) will reign on David's throne, establishing an expanding kingdom that will bring peace without end (Is 9:6 [ET 9:7]). (CC)

The light of the Christ has begun to shine in Galilee. Jesus is about to begin his ministry as Matthew concludes his material preparing for that public ministry of preaching and teaching and healing on behalf of the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Just as Matthew's first OT citation speaks of Isaiah's Immanuel, who is “God is with us” to save (Is 7:14 in Mt 1:22–23), so now the evangelist's fifth OT citation forms the ending “God is with us” bracket, thus enclosing his narrative's first major section with references from the Immanuel section of Isaiah. (CC)

Shadow of death – They could not rescue themselves from sin and its penalty.

καὶ τοῖς καθημένοις ἐν χώρᾳ καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου—I have translated τοῖς καθημένοις as a dative of advantage, “for the ones who were sitting in the region and shadow of death.” The MT has the participle of שָׁבַי, which can mean either “live,” as the LXX rendered it (οἱ κατοικοῦντες, “O you living . . .”), or “sit,” as Matthew translates. Both the LXX and Matthew translated מְלִיץ רֶגֶל (‘‘in a land of shadow of death’’) as ἐν χώρᾳ καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου, “in (the) region and shadow of death,” perhaps to avoid a double genitive construction (“of . . . of . . .”). (CC)

light has dawned – φῶς ἀνέτειλεν αὐτοῖς—In 5:45, ἀνατέλλω plus the preposition ἐπὶ and an accusative means “to rise upon” someone. This is the only NT example of the verb ἀνατέλλω taking the simple dative case. In the LXX, the simple dative after ἀνατέλλω can mean either “to rise upon” (Gen 32:32 [ET 32:31]; Wisdom 5:6) or “to rise for” (Ezek 29:21; Ps 96:11 [MT/ET 97:11]). The MT’s מְלִיץ (Is 9:1 [ET 9:2]) normally would mean “upon them” (see BDB, s.v. מְלִיץ, II 1) but could also mean “for them” (see BDB, s.v. מְלִיץ, II 1 f (c)). The LXX has φῶς λάμψει ἐφ’ ὑμῶν, “a light will shine upon you.” If Matthew is translating from the MT’s Hebrew, the verb ἀνατέλλω is somewhat unexpected, for the LXX never uses that Greek verb for the Hebrew verb מָלַךְ. (CC)

Jesus the Light rose over them and dispelled it. When a person sees a great light or when the bright sunlight shines on him, he surely attributes nothing to himself. He is passive. The point is that the unmerited kindness, the grace of God, underlies this thought.

Not only is the OT citation in 4:15–16 important in itself for Matthew’s teaching about Jesus, but this final unit (4:12–16) that concludes the Gospel’s first major section (1:1–4:16) also anticipates the ending of the entire Gospel in at least three ways. The first anticipation is the repetition that Jesus is “Immanuel,” “God is with us.” Matthew’s first Immanuel affirmation was 1:22–23, and now this first section of the Gospel ends in 4:14–16 with another “God is with us” reference. That same ending is implicit in Jesus’ promise that accompanies the making of disciples: “Look, *I am with you always*” (28:20). This Gospel proclaims the Good News that in Jesus, God is with us to save us from our sins (1:21), now and to the end of the age! (CC)

Second, 4:12–16 anticipates the end of this Gospel also by emphasizing that the light of salvation is dawning upon and “for” Galilee even as the light himself is now moving *into* Galilee. The connection is fairly obvious: Jesus’ public ministry gets underway in Galilee, the same place from which his ministry will be extended when the risen Lord Jesus sends the eleven disciples from Galilee to make other disciples (28:16–20). (CC)

Third, 4:12–16 is part of a larger anticipation as the first major section of the Gospel (1:1–4:16) draws to its close. Consider this sequence of texts: 3:13–17, followed by 4:1–11, and then by 4:12–16. Jesus is declared to be the Father’s “beloved Son” and receives his approval, for he comes to stand in the place of sinners, receiving their baptism as the representative of the “son” (see 2:15), the nation (3:13–17). Next comes the great conflict with Satan over what kind of Son of God Jesus will be. Jesus emerges victorious, choosing humble and perfect obedience to the Lord his God. Victory won, the angels appear and minister to Jesus (4:1–11). Following that conflict and angelic visitation, Jesus hears of those who oppose the reign of God, and he returns to the north, where the eschatological light of salvation dawns for Galilee of the Gentiles (4:12–16) through the coming of Immanuel, “God is with us” (1:23). These three texts at the end of the first major section of the Gospel proclaim the Son of God in place of sinners (3:13–17), Satan’s testing and Jesus’ victory attended by angels (4:1–11), and the light of Immanuel in Galilee (4:12–16). (CC)

Now compare that sequence with the end of the Gospel. There Jesus, the Son of God, is crucified precisely *because* he claims to be the Son of God (26:63–64; 27:40, 43). He is crucified in the place of

sinner, giving his life as the ransom in the place of the many (ἀντὶ πολλῶν, 20:28). The passersby keep on blaspheming him and challenging him *with the very words of Satan himself, taunting him to show what kind of Son of God he is*: “Let him save himself, *if he is the Son of God*, and let him come down from the cross. ... He trusts in God; let him rescue [him] now if he delights in him, for he said, ‘*I am the Son of God*’ ” (27:40, 43). But Jesus overcomes that temptation too and dies victorious, choosing perfect obedience and drinking the cup that is the Father’s will (26:36–46). Conflict ended and resurrection victory revealed, angels appear again—not to minister to Jesus, but to announce his resurrection to the women (28:1–10). Following the angelic visitation, there are still those who oppose the reign of God, which has now been manifested in Jesus’ victorious death and resurrection (28:11–15). Yet the Son of God returns to the north, and his eschatological mission of salvation extends from Galilee to the Gentiles, until the consummation of the age (28:16–20), because Jesus will be with his disciples as Immanuel. (CC)

The pattern in 3:13–4:16 seems too close to that in chapters 26–28 to be accidental. Here at the end of 1:1–4:16, the evangelist offers in miniature form the pattern for the salvation that Jesus will accomplish and the mission to all the nations, beginning in Galilee. (CC)

The Good News, however, is a narrative of unfolding events, things that God’s royal rule in history and on the earth actually accomplishes in Jesus. The stage is now set, and the evangelist will turn now to the narration of that public ministry as it begins to unfold in Israel. (CC)

4:17 *from that time* – Jesus wasted no time in getting going.

ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς κηρύσσειν καὶ λέγειν—This asyndetic clause marks the first of the two most important turning points in the movement, or plot, of the entire Gospel’s narrative. (The other is 16:21.) Here in 4:17, the actual events of Jesus’ public ministry in, among, and for the lost sheep of the house of Israel begin to take place. (CC)

In Matthew’s presentation of the Good News of Jesus, 4:17 stands as one of the two most important transitions in the entire Gospel (the other one being 16:21). The evangelist has introduced the person of Jesus the Christ, royal “Son of David” (1:1) and Son of God (2:15; 3:17; 4:3, 6). Matthew has also anticipated the way that Jesus will carry out his ministry of saving his people from their sins (1:21): through conflict with Satan (4:1–11) and through lowly vicarious standing with them (3:13–17). Only in 4:17, however, does the evangelist set his hand to describe, by the Spirit’s guidance, the deeds and words of Jesus for us and for our salvation. With “Jesus began ...” Mt 4:17 marks a true beginning. Now the Messiah begins to speak and to minister in the land of Israel. (CC)

Matthew provides a summary of Jesus’ preaching, and it is precisely that of the Baptizer: “Repent! For the reign of heaven stands near!” (the wording is identical in 3:2 and 4:17). John proclaimed such a message as the one who had come to prepare the Lord’s way, playing his own unique part in God’s plan to fulfill all of God’s saving deeds. Jesus proclaims the same message as the Lord himself who has come to free the people from their exile in sin and to bring God’s end-time salvation already now into the present. (CC)

To preach – *karussein* – To announce and speak formally and constantly. Each of us can announce and proclaim the good news constantly in our daily lives.

Repent. † Jesus began his public ministry with the same message as that of John the Baptist (3:2). The people must repent because God’s reign was drawing near in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Matthew distinguishes between the two calls to repentance by means of the Scripture he cites; John’s is preparatory (3:3), while Jesus’ combines word and act. (CSB)

metanoete – Means to constantly acknowledge and confess your sins. Confession goes on constantly in the life of a Christian.

Without repeating all of the commentary on John’s message in 3:2, the following points can be emphasized. First, Jesus (like John) addresses the lost sheep that are the house of Israel. Though there were certainly members of the faithful remnant, who had never lost true faith in the God of Israel, the spiritual condition of the whole nation is essentially one of “lostness.” The call “Repent!” is then a call to conversion, to move from sin and unbelief to repentant faith and salvation. (CC)

The church proclaims this same message today. (TLSB)

For – gar – This explains why they should confess their sins. Confession of sin is not a meritorious deed or attitude whereby man placates God. Man’s only help is in the person and work of Christ.

Kingdom of heaven – Both John and Jesus announced the presence of “the kingdom of heaven” lest it be misunderstood as a physical, earthly or political kingdom. It could be a subjective genitive because it comes from God in heaven through the incarnate Christ. God does the acting. This is purest Gospel.

Has dawned – *aggiken* – punctiliar-durative perfect tense and is best said “is at hand” or “is here” rather than “is near.”

μετανοεῖτε· ἤγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν—These are the identical words that were preached by John the Baptizer. (CC)

Second, when Jesus of Nazareth (like John) grounded his call to repentance in Israel with the declaration that “the reign of heaven stands near,” he was proclaiming that the kingly ruling deeds of God, expected on the Last Day, were beginning already now on the earth. The “reign of heaven” is not primarily a place. It certainly is not a group of people or an organization. The reign of heaven is the *reigning* of God, what God the King is doing—in Jesus, in history. As we shall see in the course of Matthew’s narrative, there is an eschatological “already” and “not yet” quality to God’s reign breaking into history. As I argued in the textual note on 3:2 regarding “stands near,” the perfect indicative active verb form ἤγγικεν captures well this “both present and future” of the reign of heaven. The reign of heaven has not yet fully arrived, with all of its power and salvation. At the same time, however, Jesus, the Son of God, is already here, and he is bringing a salvation that will avail *on the Last Day*. The time is urgent, and those who refuse what Jesus offers will also seal for themselves a judgment *on the Last Day*. The horizon that defines and looms large over all of Jesus’ teaching and ministry, his death, and his resurrection, is the Last Day. (CC)

The Calling of the First Disciples

¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁵“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—¹⁶the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

4:18 *Sea of Galilee*. παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλιλαίας—“The Sea of Galilee” is a freshwater inland lake, about thirteen miles by eight miles at its largest dimensions. It is known by several names in both biblical and extrabiblical sources, including Gennesaret, Tiberias, and Taricheae. (CC)

It was 682 feet below sea level. It formed a kind of bowl which allowed for storms to come up quickly and unexpectedly. (TLSB)

net. A circular casting net used either from a boat or while standing in shallow water. (CSB)

εἶδεν δύο ἀδελφούς ... βάλλοντας ἀμφίβληστρον—The predicate position participle βάλλοντας could be translated adverbially, with a temporal force: “He saw two brothers ... *as they were throwing* a casting net.” However, the following explanatory γάρ clause (ἦσαν γὰρ ἁλιεῖς, “because they were fishermen”) invites a supplementary participle translation, understanding the verbal adjective more strongly as an adjective: “He saw two brothers ... *throwing* a casting net.” (CC)

auphiblastron – Casting their “casting-net.” When skillfully cast over the shoulder it will spread out, forming a circle as it falls into the water, and then, because of the pieces of lead attached to it, will quickly sink into the water, capturing the fish underneath. They were professional fishermen.

In light of the nearness of God’s reign, which even now has come into the world in his own person, Jesus calls his first disciples. Four men are specifically named. Mt 4:18–20 and 4:21–22 exhibit such a strong parallelism that the two pairs of fishermen should not be regarded as separate in any way. Rather, the verses offer the first example of Jesus’ call to discipleship, and they function as a paradigm for discipleship. (CC)

4:19 *follow me* – δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου, καὶ ποιήσω ὑμᾶς ἁλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων—The word δεῦτε is usually used as a hortatory particle with other verbal forms in the plural. Here it functions on its own as an imperative: “Come!” (BDAG, s.v. δεῦτε). (CC)

The object of the verb ποιήσω is the plural pronoun “you” (ὕμᾱς). The second accusative, ἁλιεῖς (“fishers”), is the predicate accusative or, as Wallace labels it, the complement in an “object-complement” construction, hence, “I will make you *to be* fishers ...” The noun “fishers” (ἁλιεῖς) has a verbal root, “to fish” (ἁλιεύω), and so the genitive noun after it (ἀνθρώπων) is objective: “fishers of men” means that people will be the object of the disciples’ activity of fishing. (CC)

The most prominent feature of these verses is the overwhelming authority of the call of Jesus. In 4:19, Jesus speaks, “Come on after me, and I will make you to be fishers of men.” In 4:20, they immediately leave their nets and follow him. The pattern of Jesus’ powerful call is repeated with James and his brother John; again, they immediately respond (4:21–22). Some, concerned to show how such a dramatic response by the four could be more reasonably understood, have taken refuge in the historical information provided in the Gospel of John. There we learn that at least some of Jesus’ first disciples had come already into close contact with him in Judea before he returned to Galilee (Jn 1:35–51). However, to try to make the fishermen’s sudden response to Jesus more humanly reasonable or understandable runs the risk of lessening Matthew’s point. No one becomes Jesus’ disciple by his own initiative. Jesus calls, and only then can and do people respond. Many have underscored this point by contrasting Jesus’ call with what was apparently the normal procedure for a first-century rabbi, who gained disciples *when they sought him out*. Jesus breaks this pattern, and in that sense he is operating with the freedom of God, who calls human beings to trust and serve him. (CC)

John 15:16, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”

Fishers of men – An important question arises for Matthew’ hearers/readers from 4:18–22: For whom do the four fishermen stand? If this first calling of disciples is a paradigm, the natural question is, A paradigm of what and for whom? Matthew’s narration suggests that the four fishermen possess both a generic, “believer” quality as well as a more narrowly focused “apostle” quality. Three features of 4:18–22 and its context support this both/and approach. (CC)

In the first place, these four fisherman possess a unique quality in that they will become members of the group of Jesus' apostles. Thus the fisherman do not just stand as a paradigm for "every Christian." Rather, in some ways they show the nature of apostolic ministry, which is distinct from Jesus' call to every disciple. Three features of 4:18–22 support this distinction. The first feature is the prominence of the personal names and especially the phrase "Simon who was called Peter" (4:18). Given the prominence of Simon Peter as first in the list of the apostles (10:2–4) and as the representative of all of the Twelve in 16:13–20 and elsewhere, Matthew's readers/hearers will inevitably think of Peter and the others as those who would become Jesus' unique apostles. (CC)

The second apostolic feature is the promise "I will make you to be fishers of men" (4:19). Not all of Jesus' disciples will function in his service in the same way. The future tense, in addition, should also be taken seriously. Jesus will not make them into fishers of men until he gives them authority and sends them out in chapter 10. As the commentary especially on that chapter will highlight, throughout the centuries only some of Jesus' disciples are "sent" in the narrow sense of the term, although surely all of his disciples, through all manner of good works, will reveal the Father to the world around them (5:13–16). If one could expand the metaphor a bit, some Christians will steady the boat, some will repair the nets, and others will actually cast the nets and gather the precious catch of human lives for Christ. Sermons today should not apply this text to Christians generally as if to imply that all participate in Christ's mission to the world in the same way. (CC)

The third unique feature about the call of the fishermen in 4:18–22 is that they began literally to follow Jesus around. Now the verb "to follow" itself (ἀκολουθέω, 4:20, 22) does not indicate that the persons who are thus following are Jesus' disciples. The crowds often follow Jesus, but Matthew's narrative makes it abundantly clear that the crowds do not, as a rule, attain to the status of disciples. So not all who physically follow Jesus are his disciples. (CC)

Nor do all of his disciples literally follow him around. The most notable example here is Joseph of Arimathea, whom Matthew describes in this way: "and who himself had become a disciple of Jesus" (27:57). The commentary also argues that the various persons who emerge from out of the crowds with faith in Jesus' authority, especially in chapter 8, should be regarded as Jesus' disciples. (CC)

The twelve apostles, however, once they are constituted in chapter 10, seem virtually always to be physically with Jesus, either as an entire group or in part. Thus Matthew here in 4:18–22 wants his readers/hearers to regard the fisherman not merely as Christians, but as those Christians who will become apostles. The promise that the fishermen will become fishers of men, then, connects to the teaching office of the *apostles* through which the one holy catholic and *apostolic* church will reach out to draw others to Christ, who calls all people to be his own. (CC)

The evangelist, however, also describes the calling of the four in ways that allow his readers to learn important truths about the calling of all Christians to be Jesus' disciples. Two specific features of this account have connections to other passages in Matthew, and these connections frame these four fishermen also as "typical" disciples or Christians. The first specific feature occurs in 4:21, where Matthew writes concerning James and John, "And he called [ἐκάλεσεν] them." Mt 9:9–13 is an important parallel passage that combines these elements of calling an apostle and calling believers. There, after Jesus calls Matthew to follow him (as he did the four fishermen), Jesus describes his *general* ministry to tax gatherers and sinners with these words: "I did not come to call [καλέσαι] righteous people, but sinners" (9:13). The use of the same verb in the same general way in 22:3, 4, 8, 9 (and perhaps also in 20:8) lends a "general" quality to the events of 4:18–22. Jesus "called" the fishermen. That is, he called them to be disciples, to be believers. (CC)

A second textual item supports the first, and that is “Come after me” (δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου) in 4:19. With this clause, Jesus summons Peter and Andrew. Elsewhere in the Gospel, Christ offers his general invitation to all to come to him and be saved with the imperative δεῦτε, “Come!” (11:28; 22:4; cf. 25:34). The life of coming to and following “after” Jesus (ὀπίσω μου) applies in a general way to all Christians in 10:38 and 16:24. Thus, when Jesus calls the fisherman, he is calling them to the same life of faith to which the Lord calls all believers. (CC)

4:20 *immediately...followed* – They had acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah a year earlier (John 1). This explains their immediate compliance at this time. They were not blind followers, but were believers.

These brothers responded at once to the overwhelming authority of Jesus’ call. Their priorities would never again be the same. (TLSB)

To what are the four fishermen responding? What do they know and believe? Although the evangelist does not tell us specifically, the context provides a strong indication, so obvious that it might be missed. Jesus has just begun to proclaim, “Repent! For the reign of heaven stands near” (4:17). The four believe, even if only with faltering faith, that Jesus’ preaching is true! They have begun to acknowledge their *need* for conversion, their *need* to be saved, and they have begun to believe that through Jesus, the promised kingly saving deeds of God have broken into Israel’s history. This point will be crucial in understanding rightly the Beatitudes, the opening to the Sermon on the Mount (5:3–12). To speak in overtly Lutheran categories, the Law of God has already begun its alien work in those who are Jesus’ disciples (as it had also in those who responded to John’s preaching by confessing their sins as they were baptized by him [3:6]). They have begun to repent and to believe. (CC)

The fishermen leave their former lives and follow Jesus. It is easy to find either too much or too little significance in this aspect of their response. On the one hand, commentators at times almost speak as if the disciples clearly understood at this point who Jesus was and what discipleship might personally cost them, and were willing to pay that price. A quick reading of this Gospel (or any of the Gospels) shows how wrongheaded it is to make that much of their response. The disciples do not yet understand fully who Jesus is or what he has come to do, and they understand neither what Christian discipleship nor (in their case) apostolic ministry will eventually cost them. Nor do they completely abandon everything in the sense of having nothing to do with their former lives. They still have houses and mothers-in-law (8:14–15), mothers (20:20–28), and presumably other relationships as well. (CC)

On the other hand, there can be no doubt that just as Jesus had begun to preach and to call disciples to himself, so these disciples are given, through his preaching and call, the *beginning* of the understanding that none of their old priorities and relationships will ever be the same or will ever again possess primary importance. But the four do not know the implications of this as yet. There will be many occasions, even within the brief course of Matthew’s Gospel, when Jesus’ disciples show that they have not grasped or appropriated all the ramifications that his call will have for their lives. Nevertheless, the circumstance that defines the beginning of discipleship with Jesus, and that will go on characterizing that relationship for the fishermen (and for Jesus’ disciples of all times and places), is the authority and primacy of his call to come to him, to follow him. (CC)

4:21 *sons of Zebedee* – One commentator thinks that Zebedee was a prosperous fisherman with connections in Jerusalem.

preparing their nets. Washing, mending and hanging the nets up to dry in preparation for the next day’s work. (CSB)

Getting ready to go fishing again. God often calls people for a specific work while they are hard at work in their profession.

4:22 *immediately they...followed him* – Without debate or stipulation concerning reward. Mark says that James and John left their father in the boat with the hired men. They did not abandon him in the sense that he had no helpers. Jesus does not aid and abet people in breaking either the fourth or any commandment.

An important general observation also prevents us from seeing the fisherman in 4:18–22 *only* as apostles: the overarching shape of Matthew’s narrative. For this Gospel (like all the Gospels) *is* a narrative, and its shape cannot be ignored. The smaller, specialized, authorized group of the twelve apostles is not constituted until chapter 10. At that point only, after exhorting the general group of his disciples to pray for workers in the eschatological harvest, Jesus summoned his *twelve* disciples and gave them authority to extend his own ministry to Israel’s lost sheep (10:1–6). At this early point in the narrative in 4:18–22, the fishermen are *believers* who *will become apostles*. (CC)

It is as believers, however, that they, along with other disciples who are not named, will approach Jesus and be the primary audience as he teaches the Sermon on the Mount (5:1–2). It, the first of Jesus’ great teaching discourses, expounds with authority the divine revelation of God’s blessing in Jesus to his disciples and enunciates important truths about their calling in this world. Matthew will offer a brief yet important summary of Jesus’ ministry (4:23–24) before bringing his readers to the mount where Jesus speaks. (CC)

Jesus Heals the Sick

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, those having seizures, 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.

4:23–24 Mt 4:23–24, the substance of which is repeated in 9:35, summarizes Jesus’ early Galilean ministry. I have not included 4:25 as part of this summary for three reasons. First, unlike 4:23–24, Matthew does not in 4:25 actually describe what Jesus is doing, but rather what the many crowds did. Second, 4:25 belongs very closely with 5:1. The crowds that Jesus sees before he goes up on the mountain (5:1) are the very crowds that are first mentioned in 4:25. Third, 4:25–5:2 forms the precise opening narrative bracket for the Sermon on the Mount, the mate of which Matthew offers in 7:28–8:1, ending with the clause, “Many crowds followed him.” The commentary below on 4:25–5:2 displays the inclusio for the Sermon on the Mount more fully. (CC)

4:23 *went throughout* – *periagen* – This suggests a continuous action.

teaching ... preaching ... healing.† Jesus’ threefold ministry. The synagogues provided a place for him to teach on the Sabbath. During the week he preached to larger crowds in the open air. For an example of Jesus’ teaching and preaching see Lk 4:14–30. (CSB)

καὶ περιῆγεν ... διδάσκων ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας καὶ θεραπεύων—The imperfect *περιῆγεν* is inceptive: “He *began* to go around.” After a main verb of coming or going (*περιῆγεν*), the present tense participles (*διδάσκων ... κηρύσσων ... θεραπεύων*) probably express purpose. Hence both here and in 9:35, they are translated, “*in order to* teach ... preach ... heal.”

There is a strong analogy in 11:1, where, in another general summary description of Jesus' Galilean ministry, a genitive articular infinitive construction (τοῦ διδάσκειν καὶ κηρύσσειν) after a verb of going (μετέβη) certainly does express purpose. Since 11:1 is the third summary passage in the subsection of the Gospel (4:17–16:20) wherein 4:23–24 is the first such summary, this strong parallel encourages the view that these participles function adverbially to express the purpose of the main verb. (CC)

Matthew does not draw sharp distinctions between “teaching” (διδάσκω) and “preaching” (κηρύσσω). He uses “teach” (διδάσκω) fourteen times and “preach” (κηρύσσω) nine times. Three times the two verbs are paired (4:23; 9:35; 11:1). Perhaps “preaching” is more narrowly focused on those in need of conversion; see especially 3:1; 4:17; 10:7; 24:14; and 26:13, which are explicitly missionary contexts. Jesus' activity of “teaching” is directed at different groups, some of which consist of believers (disciples, 5:2), and others of those who need conversion: the crowds (those variously disposed toward Jesus but not yet believing in him; see especially 7:29; 26:55) and the religious leaders (those who clearly and consistently oppose Jesus [21:23, 45]). In Matthew, those who “preach” are John the Baptist (3:1), Jesus (4:17, 23; 9:35; 11:1), and his disciples (e.g., 10:7, 27; cf. 24:14; 26:13). Others besides Jesus may also “teach,” both for good (5:19 [second occurrence]; 28:20) and bad effect (15:9; 28:15). Matthew, then, employs “teaching” as a broad term, the specific contents and effects of which are determined by context. (CC)

This is the first of sixteen occurrences of θεραπεύω, “to heal,” in Matthew. On the theological significance of Jesus' healing ministry, see below, as well as on 8:17. (CC)

The synagogue is an institution of Second Temple Judaism, though its origins are obscure. The majority of scholars seem to hold that the synagogue developed, both in Palestine and in the Diaspora, after the exile and especially after the time of Ezra. Although synagogues probably performed a number of functions for a local Jewish community, they were primarily an opportunity for the reading and study of Scripture.⁵ Archaeological evidence indicates that during the time of Jesus' ministry in Galilee there were few buildings dedicated solely to use as “synagogues.” “Synagogues” could very well often have been meetings in private homes. (CC)

Matthew describes Jesus' ministry in Galilee as one of word and deed. Jesus' word consists of “the Good News of the reign” of God (4:23). After the verbal noun “Good News” (εὐαγγέλιον), the genitive “of the reign” (τῆς βασιλείας) is objective: Jesus “good news-es” the reign of heaven. God has begun to break into history in a new way, a way that links the present to the final Day of history. God has begun to break into history *in Jesus*; this is what Jesus announces. It is Good News—Gospel—because of what God is doing in Jesus, namely, saving his people from their sins. (CC)

It is a ministry of word and *deed*, because Jesus has come not only to *forgive* sin, but to *save* his people from their sins (1:21). By expressing it in this fashion, I intend in no way to downplay the importance of God's verbal declaration of forgiveness. That pronouncement through and in Christ Jesus was and is the heart of the Good News; without it, there is no Good News. However, sin has poisoned God's creation and God's people in many ways, as is evident by the catalogue of maladies that Jesus is healing in Palestine in the first century (4:23–24). Jesus comes to “save his people from their sins” (1:21), and Jesus' ministry is one of preaching and teaching and forgiving sins and of *healing* “every disease and every ailment in the people” (4:23)! When God's reign breaks into history, it comes to drive back Satan and undo all of the consequences of his slanders and temptations. Satan's seduction of Adam and Eve into sin brought physical maladies and death upon the human race (Genesis 3). Both Matthew's citation of Is 53:4 in Mt 8:17 (see the commentary there) and Jesus' answer to the Baptizer in 11:2–5 show that the one who brings the reign of heaven will also bring healing with him. (CC)

At all times, modern readers must hold fast to the eschatological character of Jesus' proclamation and manifestation of the reign of God. The very reason why there needs to be a Last Day is because of the

ongoing conflict between God and his enemies, chiefly Satan himself. The judging and saving power of that Last-Day reign has already begun in Jesus himself. Just as Jesus, the Son of God, immediately engaged in “hand-to-hand combat” with Satan in the wilderness after his Baptism (4:1–11), so in his Galilean ministry, as Matthew summarizes it in 4:23–24, Jesus heals those who were brought to him. In 4:24 a single article governs the various words describing the differently afflicted people whom others were bringing to Jesus (see the second textual note on 4:24). Some people suffer from disease or are afflicted with pain. Others are demon possessed, moonstruck, or paralyzed. It is not as though there are no distinctions between these various kinds of maladies; there clearly are, and the ancient world knew about purely medicinal cures. Matthew, however, brings these different troubles together under one theological category. These are afflictions in the people that the reign of heaven in Jesus has come to remove. The salvation that Jesus brings encompasses all of human need that finds its origin in sin and Satan. (CC)

The Last Day stands near! That nearness, however, is also preliminary and limited in scope. Jesus healed only those whom they brought to him, not everyone in the land. Moreover, it is reasonable in every way to suppose that all of the people whom Jesus healed in his ministry later died, many from illness or disease or some other “natural” cause. Jesus’ miracles were signs, a foretaste, the anticipation of the great and final deliverance that God will effect in him when he comes again in glory. At Christ’s return, all the dead shall be raised, and those in Christ shall enter everlasting life in the new creation and never again be susceptible to any bodily affliction (1 Cor 15:20–57; Rev 20:11–15; 22:1–2). Jesus’ healing miracles point to that final restoration. They are not merely “parables” that stand for the forgiveness of sins. They are miracles in which the Son of God drove back the power of Satan, sin, and sickness for the needy in the land. (CC)

The church today must avoid extremes in order to interpret faithfully Jesus’ healing miracles and exorcisms. One extreme element in modern Christianity sees demonic forces as directly responsible for every physical and mental health ailment. But Jesus cast demons only out of some of the sick people whom he healed (4:23–24). Another extreme is represented by faith healers who promise God’s physical healing now for all who will simply believe hard enough. They have neither read the Scriptures carefully nor understood their eschatological, “already *but not yet*” message. Yet another extreme is the naturalistic, “scientific” view that every ailment has a purely medical explanation and hence a potential medical cure, with no room for either demonic activity or supernatural healing. We must not live, preach, and pray as if the kinds of maladies and miracles in our text only happened back then—as if the demonic powers can have no real effect on our lives today, and as if the reign of God could not break in today with miracle and sign and power and healing. All claimed experiences, whether of demonic influence or of miraculous healing, must be subject to scriptural scrutiny, and nothing can violate the great truths of biblical theology. Yet when we pray, “Thy kingdom come,” who knows how the risen and reigning Christ may answer, even as the promised final healing and fulfillment of the Day of the reign of God continue to tarry? (CC)

Teaching – didaskon – This reminds us immediately of the Sermon on the Mount.

Preaching – karusson – heralding, announcing the Gospel.

Every disease – nosmos which denotes a disease of the whole body.

Affliction – malakia which points to an infirmity of any particular part of the body attended with pain.

4:24 *Syria*. The area north of Galilee and between Damascus and the Mediterranean Sea. (CSB)

This refers loosely to the region north of Galilee, where both Jews and Gentiles lived. (CC)

ἀπῆλθεν ἡ ἀκοὴ αὐτοῦ εἰς ὅλην τὴν Συρίαν—After the verbal noun ἀκοή, “report,” the genitive αὐτοῦ, “of him,” is objective. The implied kernel sentence is “They heard (about) him.” “Syria” likely refers loosely to the region north of Galilee. (CC)

those having seizures. The Greek word for this expression originally meant “moonstruck” and reflects the ancient superstition that seizures were caused by changes of the moon. (CSB)

the paralyzed. A transliteration of the Greek that has come directly into English. Greek physicians were among the best in ancient times, and many of our medical terms come from their language. (CSB)

τοὺς κακῶς ἔχοντας ποικίλαις νόσοις καὶ βασάνοις συνεχομένους [καὶ] δαιμονιζομένους καὶ σεληνιαζομένους καὶ παραλυτικούς—The single masculine plural accusative article τοὺς governs all five of the following adjectival forms: four participles (ἔχοντας ... συνεχομένους ... δαιμονιζομένους ... σεληνιαζομένους) and an adjective (παραλυτικούς). The grammatical effect is to link together the different kinds of suffering into one common group: people healed by Jesus. Thus Jesus healed them all. (CC)

The translation of the first participle and adverb, κακῶς ἔχοντας, is, literally, “having badly.” In the NT ἔχω often is used for “having” an illness or demon (see BDAG, s.v. ἔχω, 7 a α). The second participle is of συνέχω, which in the passive can mean “be distressed, tormented” (see BDAG, s.v. συνέχω, 5) and which takes the dative, ποικίλαις νόσοις καὶ βασάνοις, “with various illnesses and severe pains.” (CC)

The verb σεληνιάζομαι is derived from σελήνη, “moon,” and so the participle literally means “be moonstruck” or (based on Latin *luna*, “moon”) “lunatic” (KJV), though most modern translations relate it to epilepsy or seizures. The only other NT occurrence of σεληνιάζομαι is in 17:15, where a father uses it to describe his lad, whose infirmity Jesus removes by casting a “demon” out of him, so that he is “healed” (17:17–18). This suggests a close connection between being “moonstruck” and being demon possessed. (CC)

4:25 *great crowds* – An emphasis in Matthew; “crowd” occurs 50 times. (TLSB)

the Decapolis. A league of free cities characterized by high Greek culture. All but one, Scythopolis (Beth Shan), were east of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River. The league stretched from a point northeast of the Sea of Galilee southward to Philadelphia (modern Amman). (CSB)

ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ Δεκαπόλεως καὶ Ἱεροσολύμων καὶ Ἰουδαίας καὶ πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου—Cousland carefully examines the geographical references in 4:25. He concludes that, although Matthew would hold that the “crowds” that followed Jesus could include Gentiles (especially from Syria and the Decapolis), the makeup of the crowds would have been largely Jewish. That would be consistent with Matthew’s emphasis on Jesus as Israel’s Messiah, whose earthly ministry is especially focused on the lost sheep of the house of Israel. That is also supported by the reference to Jesus’ healing ministry among “the people” in 4:23, since Matthew seems always to use ὁ λαός to refer in one way or another to Israel or a portion of it. (CC)

Refers to 10 cities east of the Jordan with large Gentile populations. (TLSB)

Followed him – καὶ ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ ὄχλοι πολλοί—Though the crowds followed Jesus physically, this does not imply discipleship, faith, or understanding. the disciples, whom Jesus called to follow him, and the crowds who followed Jesus. (CC)

Matthew is about to present the first of the five major discourses of Jesus in his Gospel, which has been known for centuries as “the Sermon on the Mount.” With an impressive and deliberate formality, Matthew prepares his readers/hearers to receive Jesus’ words to his disciples. After ascending a mountain, Jesus “sat down” (5:1). “His disciples” (5:1), distinct from the “crowds” (4:25), approached him. Jesus “opened his mouth” (5:2). He “*began* to teach them” (5:2). Jesus will *continue* to teach all the way until the fifth and final discourse, when he finishes “*all* these words” (26:1). Jesus’ five major speeches, all marked by an identical concluding formula whereby they are integrated into the three-part narrative structure (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1), are not the major organizing “backbone” of the Gospel’s narrative. Nevertheless, Jesus’ discourses provide crucial truth and revelation, chiefly for the disciples. (CC)

As part of the introduction to the Sermon, Matthew mentions for the first time the figure of the “crowds” who followed Jesus (4:25). As is clear in these verses and throughout the Gospel, the “crowds” never attain to the status of those who believe in Jesus, even if imperfectly. Although 7:28–29 will declare that in some sense Jesus also teaches the Sermon to the crowds, the specific comment in 5:1–2 that “*his disciples* approached him, and he opened his mouth and began to teach *them* and say ...” distinguishes Jesus’ “disciples” from the “crowds.” These crowds hear Jesus’ words. Moreover, they understand his claim to authority and are astonished by it, though they do not show that they accept his claim (see the textual note on ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων in 7:29). However, through Jesus’ authoritative teaching, it is possible for individuals to emerge from the crowds and to *become* disciples. (CC)

4:12-25 Isaiah described the sinful state of this world: people walking in darkness and the shadow of death, unable to find their way and lacking the ability to help themselves. Into this back hole comes Jesus, the light of the world his great light shines first in Galilee, where he calls disciples, teaches, preaches, and heals. His great light continues to shine in our darkness. The good news of God’s reign continues to be sounded in Word and Sacrament. To sinful, hurting people, Jesus gives life, hope, and deliverance. * Mya your light shine in us as we share your Gospel with the world, O Christ, our light. Shine on us and through us. Amen (TLSB)