

# “Matthew”

## Fall Series 1

### Lesson 5

## “Matthew 4:1-25”

**Objective:** To understand the message that Matthew meant to convey to his audience and then to come to understand what that message means for us today as those living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We will seek to ascertain what this message means and to determine how we are intended to live our lives as those who are disciples of Christ in our modern context, in light of the message it contains. We will place special emphasis upon application.

**Materials:** I will begin by examining carefully the Greek text of Matthew, examine other early translations such as the Syriac Peshitta, various modern translations, and any other sources relevant to the historical setting of the first century Roman world that can help us to understand the original meaning. I will then examine early interpretations and understandings and examine commentaries and modern interpretations to enlighten our understanding, help us make application to our current situation.

#### Procedures

1. We will begin by examining the text from the Greek text.
2. We will examine the contextual setting and seek to understand as much as we possibly can about the historical, cultural, and social settings, in order to understand the message Matthew intended and that God still intends for us.
3. From here, we will seek to find out how to best apply the words of Matthew, for the early disciples, then to our modern contextual framework as disciples of Jesus.
4. We will seek to understand the attitudes that we are called to have as disciples and to reflect not only the actions that are the calling of a disciple, but also to learn how to form our attitudes and thoughts in order to reflect our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

# Lesson

In chapter 3 we are given the account of the Spirit of God descending upon Jesus. As chapter 4 begins we find the Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness. In some ways, this leading into the wilderness reenacts the leading of Israel into the wilderness when they left Egyptian slavery.<sup>1</sup> For all of us who know that story, we are cognizant of the fact that Israel will remain there for forty years as again and again they failed the tests that were placed before them. Here, in Matthew, we are told specifically that the purpose for Jesus being led into the wilderness is so that He might be “tempted,” or “tested.” An additional indication that we are intended to connect this event to the forty years wandering in the wilderness is the length of time that Jesus fasted, which is forty days and forty nights. Whereas it is the Spirit which leads Jesus into the wilderness it is “the enemy,” “the adversary,” “the

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 8:2-3 **Remember the long road on which the LORD your God led you during these forty years in the desert so he could humble you, testing you to find out what was in your heart: whether you would keep his commandments or not. 3 He humbled you by making you hungry and then feeding you the manna that neither you nor your ancestors had ever experienced, so he could teach you that people don't live on bread alone. No, they live based on whatever the LORD says.** CEB.

devil” (διαβόλου - *diabolou*) that “tempts,” “tests,” or “tries,” (πειρασθῆναι - *peirasthenai*) Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to get the nuance of the word that is so often translated as to “tempt,” or to “test,” which is used here by Matthew. It is a word that is not ambivalent nor in any sense neutral. The devil is here seeking to induce Jesus to act in a way contrary to the will of God. That is his set purpose and aim.<sup>3</sup> As we read these verses and hear of the temptation of Jesus we often extrapolate the circumstances in a way that steers our understanding of this event in a direction that is not warranted by what is written by Matthew. We often focus on the temptation dealing with how Jesus will accomplish His mission. Will He take some short-cuts by performing miracles before an audience that will proclaim His greatness, that He is indeed the Messiah. However, this is not the focus of the tests at all. There is no indication that Jesus has, or would have, an audience in performing the miraculous feats suggested to Him by Satan.

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<sup>2</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary series, Vol. 33 (Dallas TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1993) p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, in The New International Commentary on the New Testament series (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), pp. 126-127.

We have often interpolated such an understanding, perhaps with the aid of some well-meaning Bible class teachers. The whole point of going into the wilderness is to get away from people, to put Jesus in the position of being alone with His fears, with His solitude, and to test His newly proclaimed understanding of what it means to be declared the “Son of God.” At 4:3, exactly this title will play a part in the test that Jesus must undergo. The first test, the one of turning the stones into bread is not to impress an audience, but to assuage His great hunger. He has not eaten for forty days. The temptation, or the test, is will He pursue the course set for Him by God, or instead use His power to deal with His own wants and needs.<sup>4</sup> Will He remain loyal and steadfast.

In the wilderness wanderings of the first exodus Israel repeatedly failed their tests. Israel, repeatedly sought what they wanted, their path, rather than trusting in God to provide them with what was needed rather than what they wanted, or desired. The issue here is will Jesus remain loyal to God, even in His weakened state, in His great need and in the midst of His raging hunger? The special relationship that was just recently been

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<sup>4</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 126-128.

declared to exist between Jesus and His father is being brought under scrutiny. Will Jesus exploit His special status for His own comfort and benefit, or instead, will He seek to remain loyal to God. The devil is seeking to drive a wedge between Jesus and His Father. He seeks to challenge this newly proclaimed status. These tests are not about how Jesus will respond before, or for, spectators, but in order to challenge His loyalty to His Father.

At 4:4 Jesus responds with a quote from Deuteronomy 8:3.<sup>5</sup> This strengthens the connection between what is happening to Jesus and what happened to Israel in the first exodus. Jesus will continue to answer Satan with quotes from Deuteronomy. Israel was tested, and Israel repeatedly failed the tests. Jesus passes this test by focusing on that which is important rather than that which is expedient or even considered to be wise by worldly standards. Can you imagine the raging hunger that would encompass you if you had not eaten for forty days? True life, true living, comes to those who listen to the words of God and are nourished by them. The words of God nourish the soul, the place of true life.<sup>6</sup> Jesus


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<sup>5</sup> **He humbled you by making you hungry and then feeding you the manna that neither you nor your ancestors had ever experienced, so he could teach you that people don't live on bread alone. No, they live based on whatever the LORD says.** CEB.

<sup>6</sup> **Genesis 2:7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.** KJV.

pursues true nourishment, timeless, lasting nourishment, not temporary, fading nourishment. We so often seek instant gratification for our hungers, our needs, and in so doing we sacrifice what is of lasting value, what is more important, and more necessary for the immediate, short-term gratification. Jesus does not fail to keep the proper focus even in the midst of His raging hunger and I am sure, the great pain, that comes with it. What are some of the short-term based decisions that you have made that have brought you long-term negative consequences? How would life be different for you if you trusted and would trust in God and take the long view, the view into eternity?

At 4:5, the devil moves on from his first test to the second, because the first test had clearly failed and Jesus had passed and remained loyal to God. The devil continues to probe for weakness, for an opening, where he can launch his attack. He had attacked people in their weakness before and he would continue to do it again and again. Every human being before this moment had failed, at some point, in their testing; they had sinned. I am sure Satan was confident that this one would be no different from all who had gone before; the devil is persistent and determined.



Next, the devil takes Jesus to the highest point of the temple and challenges Him to throw Himself off and basically see if God will catch Him. We have often been told that what is going on here is that the devil is offering Jesus a short-cut to start His ministry. The idea being that if he jumps off people will see Him and recognize the hand of God when He catches Him. This totally misses the point as is reflected in the answer of Jesus at 4:7. The concern is not about the success for His ministry, but will He continue to be willing to trust God. Does He need to test God in order to bolster His trust? His answer is, “No, I choose to trust God.” He refuses the devil’s offer.

At 4:8, the devil brought Jesus to a very high mountain and somehow showed Him all the kingdoms of the earth, and their glory. In this test, we see into the heart of the devil and we see how different from the heart of God his heart is. The devil is focused on power and glory. God already has all power and all glory and chooses something more, something greater, that in truth actually multiplies His glory. He seeks relationship, He chooses love and self-sacrifice; things that are alien and considered unimportant to the devil. There is a stark contrast in

philosophy, in understanding, in goals between God and the devil. The ways of the devil are not the ways of God. The devil wants Jesus to “fall down” (*πεσῶν - peson*) and to “worship, to honor him (*προσκυνήσης - proskuneseis*). He wants Jesus to betray God and benefit Himself, to pursue what is best for Himself, rather than to follow the path that God has set before Him. He wants Jesus to take the easy path through this life and to focus on this present existence in the world and to sacrifice the future for the short term gratification of needs.

When we are training our children we seek to teach them to consider the consequences of their actions. How far into the future do we train them to look? Hopefully, as followers of Christ we teach them to reflect on eternity, to focus upon eternal values, but sometimes I suspect we send mixed messages and confused signals by our choices and by what we tell them. Matthew wants his audience to understand the focus of His life and His existence. His focus is to do the will of God.

Jesus understands eternity. What audacity the devil has, what arrogant hubris he possesses, that he should attempt to persuade the author of life itself to betray His principals, His



ideals, His goals, because of the momentary weakness of His current condition. I assume the devil thought that God had not considered the consequences of pain, hunger, and hardship, in His choice to take on flesh. At 4:10 we receive the response of Jesus to the request of the devil and with it a new word is used identifying more precisely who it is that is tempting Him, Satan.<sup>7</sup> **Jesus responded, “Go away, Satan, because it’s written, You will worship the Lord your God and serve (λατρεύσεις - *latreuseis*) only him.”**<sup>8</sup> In this verse, the concepts of “service” and “worship” are powerfully tied together. They are inseparable.<sup>9</sup> Throughout Scripture, all the way back to Genesis 2:15,<sup>10</sup> we can find this connection. It may be harder for us to see in our English translations, but it is there. The word translated in our English translations as to “till,” as in, “to till and keep it,” is also used of the service of those who minister in the temple; we find this connection in both Greek and Hebrew.

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<sup>7</sup> Σατανᾶ, “the accuser,” “the chief of the evil spirits,” “the adversary,” “the opponent.”

<sup>8</sup> CEB. A quote from Deuteronomy 6:13.

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 2:15 אָבַד - *avedah* - “to work,” or “to serve.” This Hebrew word for “to work,” or “to serve” would be the same word that was used of the priestly service offered by the priests and Levites. Also in the Old Greek translation cf. λατρεύω - *latreuo* - Numbers 16:9.

<sup>10</sup> **The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.** NRSV.

Jesus makes it clear that we are to “worship” and “serve” only God. With this response from Jesus, the devil left Him and then “messengers” from God came and “served” (διακονέω - *diakoneo*<sup>11</sup>) Him. Matthew simply indicates that the devil left Him, while Luke indicates that he left him “until an opportune time.”<sup>12</sup> Satan tried his best, at one of the weakest points in the life of Jesus, and yet he failed to cause Jesus to sin, to turn against God.<sup>13</sup> Jesus is resolute in His trust of God and stands as a beacon of light for us as His followers. This is to be our focal point too. His resolve, and His faithfulness, have for two thousand years inspired people to choose obedience to God over their own self-interests, their own well-being, over what benefits themselves. They have been willing to follow His lead and say no to the devil and say yes to God. The response and resolve of Jesus still stands as an act of defiance against submitting to the forces of evil, the enemies of God.

At 4:12, Matthew returns once again to news of John. Jesus hears that John has been arrested. While we hear of the arrest of

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<sup>11</sup> This is the cognate verb for our English word “deacon.”

<sup>12</sup> Luke 4:12 - NRSV.

<sup>13</sup> cf. Hebrews 4:15.

John here, we will have to wait until 14:3-4 to find out what lies behind the arrest of John. Needless to say John said something that someone did not like.<sup>14</sup> The arrest of John will seemingly spur a response from Jesus who will now leave Nazareth and settle in Capernaum, which lies alongside the sea of Galilee, in the ancestral land of Zebulun and Naphtali. At 4:14, Matthew wants us to, once again, understand that Jesus is fulfilling prophecy.<sup>15</sup> He also wants to continue to hint at the Gentile aspect to the mission of Jesus here. The effect of what Matthew sets out is that Galilee is designated as the place of light as opposed to the darkness which we will find has settled over Judea.<sup>16</sup>

We then come the time that Jesus began to announce that they should, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”<sup>17</sup>

Up to this point Jesus has largely been a passive figure in

Matthew’s story, but things change now and Jesus goes on the


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<sup>14</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary series, Vol. 33 (Dallas TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1993) p. 72.

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 9:1-2 - **But there will be no gloom for those who were 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 will make 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 lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.** NRSV.

<sup>16</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 139.

<sup>17</sup> 4:17b - NRSV.



initiative.<sup>18</sup> This marks the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus and in this beginning we can see a continuity with the ministry of John the Baptist. What John began, Jesus will now continue. The focus is once again upon the “kingdom of heaven.” For us we often think in spatial terms when we think of kingdom, but the connection that Jesus makes with repentance indicates that something more is in view here, something more than just territory. I have often heard it said that in war one can win the physical battles, but if one does not win the hearts and minds of the people the war is lost.<sup>19</sup> Jesus sets out to win the war not just the battles.

Often as a church, we have forgotten this focus. We have won many battles and yet in the winning of the battles we have lost focus on winning the hearts and minds of the people. Often it is better to lose the battle and win the war. What do I mean? Our confrontational attitude causes us to many times lose the war, even though we win the battle. There are times to be confrontational and Jesus will at times be confrontational, but at other times, even when others are confrontational, He will take


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<sup>18</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 143.

<sup>19</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winning\\_hearts\\_and\\_minds](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winning_hearts_and_minds)

the long view and win hearts and minds rather than battles. Many times the followers of Christ have received a bad name in the community for their confrontational and difficult nature. They have come across as unloving, unkind, and unsafe.

At 4:18, we come to the account of Jesus calling Peter and Andrew as His disciples. The account is stark, uncluttered, and matter of fact. It is not meant to reflect on all of the details that led up to that moment or to reflect on the process of decision making, but it is meant to make it very apparent that people have choices. Choices require decisions. Making no decision is actually a decision, and Jesus calls upon His followers to be decisive in their choice to follow Him; to respond decisively and promptly. Their response at 4:20 demonstrates their stark and decisive choice to follow Jesus. There is a suddenness (*εὐθέως* - *eutheos* - *straight away, immediately, or at once*) to their following of Jesus that will be even more clearly expressed in 4:22 when the sons of Zebedee leave their boat and their father and follow Jesus. Matthew is laying out his case for the fact that God gives a choice to all people and we need to be decisive when we hear the call of Jesus to follow immediately, leaving all else behind. Can you



remember a time when you have done this? What feelings did it give you?

Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee teaching in their synagogues (4:23). This statement is likely one that we quickly skim over without letting it really impact us. How many prophets and messengers had God sent to the people of Israel throughout the years? How many times had they rejected and killed those who were sent by God because their message offended them? Yet, God still continues to seek to restore relationship with them and He continues to share with them a message designed to be “good news” for them. Most would not listen, but some had been waiting their whole life for just such a moment. They had prepared their heart and longed for the coming of God’s Messiah. That longing would result in recognition and obedient following when they encountered Jesus. What are some ways that you have prepared your heart for the call of the Messiah? What are some ways that you are preparing the hearts and minds of your children for that calling?

Jesus announced the “good news” that the “kingdom of God” was near and along with this He healed disease and sickness.

Disease and sickness are remnants of this world, of the world ruled by Satan and his minions. Where the “kingdom of heaven” intersects with the kingdom of this world disease and sickness are driven out and replaced by healing, comfort and strength. The word translated here as “healing,” or “curing” is the Greek word *θεραπεύων - therapeuon* from which we get our English word “therapy.” The message and ministry of Jesus are therapeutic for our world, bringing healing and release from disease and sickness. Certainly I believe that physical healing was taking place in the ministry of Jesus, but much more was going on, over and above the physical healing. Jesus is engaged in spiritual warfare. This point will not have been missed by the ancients. We so often focus on the literal and the physical whereas, they will have understood the intricate connection between the physical world and the spiritual world. They are not separate and apart from one another, but interconnected with one another. They are symbiotic, with one affecting the other, and actions in one impacting both areas.

In our reality, one that is so powerfully dominated by a scientific approach, we can focus so intensely upon the part of

creation that we can touch with our physical senses that we allow our spiritual senses to atrophy and decay to the point that they no longer function. To be fair, the audiences of Jesus would often focus on the physical too. It is likely that many came to hear Jesus and to see Jesus because they wanted to see a good show and they too failed to understand this connection of the battle of the forces of this world with the power of heaven. One of the things that we perhaps too skip over far too quickly is found in 4:24 where we are informed that people were bringing all who were possessed by demons. We perhaps see this as a quaint quirk of the past, or as merely superstition on their part. They did not see things that way, and even in our modern world there are times when the only logical explanation for what afflicts certain people is that they are in fact afflicted by demons.

Which doctor would you take a demon afflicted person to see? How do antibiotics and drugs affect demons? Probably not something that we really give much thought to in our daily life. Maybe we believe that we are exempt today, or that such things do not happen in the modern era. I firmly believe such an assumption is in error. The spiritual conflict continues and rages



on. We are still greatly effected by demons in our world today. I believe that deep down many people know this to be true, but they face ridicule and recrimination if they even admit that they hold to such a possibility. Throughout the history of the church there has been a realization among many that demons still exist, are still active, and are a great danger in our world. Jesus still heals those tormented by demons today. His power and His Spirit still bring healing and relief today. When was the last time you prayed for spiritual protection for someone, or is it only their physical ailments, perhaps the symptoms, that you pray to have relieved?<sup>20</sup> Read the prayers of Paul and contrast them with our prayers today.<sup>21</sup>

The battles continue to rage between the “kingdom of heaven” and the kingdom of this world. Jesus and His followers till bring the “good news.” We still face the tests and trials that Satan brings before us as he seeks to coerce us into betraying God. He knows our weaknesses and our weak moments. As we transition

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<sup>20</sup> Ephesians 6:10-17.

<sup>21</sup> Romans 1:8-10; 10:1; 12:12; 15:5-6; 15:13; 15:30-33; 1 Corinthians 1:4-9; 16:23; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7; 2:14-16; 9:12-15; 12-7-9a; 13:7-9; Galatians 6:18; Ephesians 1:3ff.; 1:15-23; 3:14-21; 6:19-20; Philippians 1:3-6; 1:9-11; 4:6-7; 4:23; Colossians 1:3-14; 4:2-4; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3; 2:13-16; 3:9-13; 5:23-24; 5:28; 2 Thessalonians 1:3ff.; 1:11-12; 2:16-17; 3:1-5; 3:16; 1 Timothy 1:12; 2:1ff.; 2 Timothy 1:3-7; 1:16-18; 4:22; Titus 3:15b; Philemon 4-7; 25.

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into Matthew 5 Jesus will, in His sermon on the Mount, provide us with much guidance and much wisdom for helping us to overcome our passions, our selfishness, our weaknesses, and stand firm as followers of Jesus.

# Synopsis

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In this chapter, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness so that He might be tested by Satan. This is after He had fasted for forty days and forty nights. We are meant to find a connection with the first exodus where the Israelites were tested in the wilderness and the temptation of Jesus. Whereas they failed those tests of being loyal and obedient to God, Jesus does not fail and continually expresses loyalty. Jesus continues to focus on the things of God, the kingdom of God, and orders Satan to leave Him.

John is arrested and this seems to be the trigger for Jesus to begin His public ministry. Matthew seems intent on taking every opportunity to express the taking of the good news to the Gentiles as an expression of the promise made to Abraham.<sup>22</sup> Jesus proclaims the same message that John had been proclaiming and continues what he began.

Jesus began calling disciples and here he calls four fishermen who He says he will show how to fish for people. Jesus then travels around Galilee teaching in the synagogues. He heals

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<sup>22</sup> Genesis 12:3 **I will bless those who bless you, those who curse you I will curse; all the families of earth will be blessed because of you.** CEB.



the sick, and those possessed by demons and large crowds came to hear Him and see the miracles He performed. This is the beginning of His public ministry. In this chapter are the beginnings, of the coming of the kingdom of heaven.

# Main Points


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- The account of the testing of Jesus in the wilderness after His baptism.
- The tests Jesus encountered challenged His loyalty to God and His agenda for ministry.
- Jesus begins His ministry after the arrest of John. He begins in Galilee of the Gentiles. Jesus repeats the same message that John had proclaimed.
- Jesus calls people into discipleship and they respond by leaving everything behind and following Him.
- Jesus preaches in the synagogues, heals the sick, and drives out demons. The kingdom of God advances.

# Questions

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1. When is a time in your life that you have been led by the Spirit to do something?
2. What are some ways that you face temptation in your life?
3. How do you overcome temptations?
4. Why do you think Jesus fasted?
5. What are some ways that you are nourished by God's word?
6. What are some ways that you process important decisions in your life?
7. Do you ever feel that you are "testing" the Lord?
8. What are some of the ways that you express your worship to God?
9. Do you ever respond to Satan in a way that makes him go away from you?
10. Why do you think Jesus began His ministry in Galilee rather than in Jerusalem?
11. Why do you think Matthew continues to have a focus upon Gentiles in his writings?
12. What are some ways that you express repentance (change of heart) in your life?
13. What are some ways that you have answered the calling of Jesus to be His disciple?
14. What, and who, have you left behind to follow Jesus?

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15. Where do you see the “kingdom of heaven” overtaking the kingdom of “this world” today?
  16. How willing are you to respond to the calling of Jesus in your life?
  17. Do you think demons are still active in our world today? Why, or why not?
  18. What are some ways that you engage in spiritual warfare today?
  19. What is it that you hope for in following Jesus?

# To Take Home

## **What is Important to know?**

It is important for us to respond to the calling of Jesus to follow Him. Sometimes we think it is just a one-time call, but it is a calling that we face each moment of each hour of each day that we live. We are engaged in a long-term war and it is important to win the war and we must not just win a battle and lose the war. Our conflict is one in which Jesus seeks to win the hearts and souls of people. What are some ways that you have seen people turned away from Christianity because of the actions and attitudes of Christians?

## **Where is God in these words?**

God is in these words challenging us to focus on things that are important and to avoid getting mired down in lesser things. It is so easy for us to stay busy and to keep ourselves occupied with things that really have no eternal value. We have a great many distractions in our world today. We have whole virtual worlds to explore and to engage with. There is nothing wrong with engaging in recreation to relax and unwind, but at some point we must return to the front and engage in the war. What are some ways that you remain focused on the war between light and darkness?

## **What does any of this mean for how I live my life?**

I am called to be a follower of Jesus as are all those who hear His voice. That means making different choices than are considered wise and practical by the wisdom of this world. The focus is different. We are challenged to leave behind our family and our occupations if Jesus calls us to something else. What would you be willing to leave behind in order to follow Jesus?

## **What is the word of God calling us to do?**

The word of God is calling upon us to join Him in the redemption and the transformation of this world and the transfer of it into the rule and reign of heaven. God has initiated this change and transformation. He has called His children to join Him in this task. Those who answer His call to follow are also those who are His children. How do you think that you are best able to serve God in advancing His kingdom?