

# The Preaching of Jesus Christ

Rev. H. Hofman, Sr. – Matthew 4:17

Sing: Psalter 397:2, 5, 6, 7, 8

Read: Matthew 4

Sing: Psalter 109

Sing: Psalter 255:3, 4

Sing: Psalter 325:1, 2

Congregation,

We ask your attention for the Word of God, which you can find in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 4:17, where we read, “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

This portion of Scripture fixes our attention in particular on the preaching of Jesus Christ. With the help of the Lord, we would like to consider three thoughts:

1. The Place Where Jesus Preached
2. The Necessity of Jesus’ Preaching
3. The Contents of Jesus’ Preaching

## 1. The Place Where Jesus Preached

Congregation, Jesus’ public ministry in the state of His humiliation lasted for a period of just over three years. Four times during these three years, Jesus celebrated the Passover feast, as we can read in the Gospel according to John. When our text declares, “From that time,” then this means the beginning of the year 27, before the first Passover would be held, which would coincide with our month of April.

“From that time” also means after the temptation in the wilderness by the devil. The devil knows much, and he tried everything he could to cause the second Adam, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to fall. He tried with all his might to block the way of the Saviour. He is the great adversary and will craftily employ every effort to hinder the preaching. Let it always be our prayer, “Deliver us from evil.” Also today, as we are here in God’s house, the devil will attempt to prevent us from listening to God’s Word.

“From that time.” This also points to the end of the preaching of John the Baptist, who had with all his heart pointed out the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world. He had preached the necessity of conversion to everyone who had come to him by the river Jordan. He had experienced deeply in his own heart, I am nothing and Christ is everything.

From the depths of his heart he had cried out, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). “There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose” (Mark 1:7). He had pointed out to the people their sins and the necessity of conversion, but also the remedy, the precious and purifying blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist had experienced that where Jesus Christ is preached, the enmity of the devil also breaks out. John had been cast into prison and his mouth had been stopped, not because he had done anything wrong, but because of the words he had spoken. It had not been an easy time for him for we know He experienced darkness within. He had sent two of his disciples to Jesus with the question, “Art Thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3). He did not know what to think of everything that had taken place.

Congregation, perhaps you have also come to a dead end in your life. Does the question live in your heart, “Is this the way of salvation?” True, you have been given to see so much preciousness in the Lord Jesus Christ that your heart has gone out after Him on account of His Word. You have sung praises of the Lamb of God which has taken away the sins of the world--but now you sit, as it were, in prison, not understanding anything anymore of what you have experienced. Doubts and uncertainties fill your heart. Did I deceive myself? Was it really from the Lord, or was it all of my own imagination? You have many questions and there are no answers. That makes it all so difficult and you find no relief. It is your earnest prayer that you may find a solution to your soul’s struggles.

Faith, which the Lord has worked in one’s heart, will be tested. We must learn to live by faith and that assurance of salvation cannot be deduced by the outward circumstances of our lives. The work of God is opposed and resisted, but the Lord will never forsake the work of His own hands. He is faithful and true. He will give light upon a dark pathway. John the Baptist’s mouth had been closed, but God’s work continues!

Our text tells us, “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” We read in verse 12, “Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee.” And it was from that time on that Jesus began to preach.

Let us pause here for a moment and think about this: Jesus preached. During the first period of His public ministry, Jesus especially focussed on preaching; it was the first thing He began to do. To bring sinners to the light by means of preaching is the first and greatest necessity. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 10, verse 14, “How shall they hear without a preacher?” And this is how Jesus began His public work ..., with preaching. Jesus, the Son of God, Light of Light, the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, the Supreme Wisdom, the Teacher of Righteousness, preaches!

Also today, by means of His servants, His Word comes to each one of us, both young and old. Have you ever thought this through, congregation? Jesus preaches. At the time of the

Lord Jesus, many people came to hear His preaching. We read in verse 25, “And there followed Him great multitudes of people.” Many felt themselves drawn to His words. Jesus spoke so honestly, so freely, and so very differently from what they were accustomed to hearing from their rabbis.

Where did Jesus preach? In verses 13 through 16, we read that He preached in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim. Isaiah called it the “Galilee of the nations.” Or we could say--the land of sinners. It was the place where the influence of the heathen nations was the greatest, a land far from Jerusalem. Many people lived there, people who lived in darkness and the shadow of death, far from the service of God. Nevertheless, God’s promises were upon these people. Verse 16 tells us, “The people which sat in darkness saw a great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.” Moses had prophesied in Deuteronomy 33:23, “O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the LORD: possess thou the west and the south.”

Think about this a moment, congregation, that Jesus began to preach here in this land of darkness, where death reigned and where the power of Satan was so great. This is where the Son of God opened His mouth to bring the message from heaven, from out the loving heart of His Father. For He was sent by the Father with a message for Galilee, that land of sinners. It was a message for sinful people. That is where Jesus began to preach.

Jesus. You know the meaning of His Name, don’t you? The angel had said to Joseph, “And thou shalt call His Name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matthew 4:21). The meaning of His Name is “Saviour.” To save means to deliver from the greatest evil and to bring to the highest good. That is, on the one hand, so very simple; and yet, on the other hand, so unfathomably deep! It was God’s will that in this way the Scripture would be fulfilled. Behind the preaching of Jesus we see God’s eternal good pleasure. It is God’s sovereign will that sinners be reconciled to Him, that sinners be drawn out of Satan’s power, that they be born again through the Holy Spirit, and that they hear the voice of the Son of God and live.

Maybe you say to yourself, “Yes, I know this for I have heard it so many times already. But I feel so unworthy. I stand outside of it. I cannot and dare not think that this could also be for me. I believe this is for God’s people, but I am not one of them.”

Is this the concern of your heart, congregation, boys and girls? Listen for a moment. Jesus did not first go to Jerusalem, to the Pharisees and scribes. They knew of themselves how they could obtain eternal life. There were so many rich young rulers who knew the way to find the kingdom of God. They saw themselves as people obeying God’s law and were convinced that there was nothing lacking in them. But, congregation, the Lord Jesus could do no work for these people. They were able to help themselves.

Perhaps some among us today think they are the greatest sinners and who have come to an end with all their own works. You experienced that in spite of all your good-doing, you are still so far away from the Lord.

You are sitting here with a heart full of questions and you have no answers. Your earnest questions are, “How can I be reconciled with God? Who will pay for my guilt?” You confess that your guilt is a heavy burden, for you know that you have grievously transgressed all of God’s commandments from your very youth. The thought of the wrath of God and eternal darkness causes you to tremble with fear. Death pursues you, and you know of no way of escape.

Congregation, this is where Jesus begins to preach. He knows the need is greatest where the sinner finds himself living in the land of sinners, the place where God’s eternal thoughts of peace are proclaimed first. No, in Galilee there were no stretched out hands for the gospel. There were no eager hearts. The people lived in darkness and in the shadow of death. Where the shadow of death is, there is death itself. Here in that land, the words of Isaiah 65:1 are fulfilled: “I am sought of them that asked not for me.”

Congregation, what a merciful and wondrous appearance this was when Jesus came to the land of the Gentiles, to a people who had strayed so far from the ways of the Lord. Here we see the abundance of God’s grace where the gospel is brought as a joyful message for people who lie in the midst of death, for a people who are held captive in the cruel mire of death, bound in their own iniquity, unable to break these chains on their own. This is exactly where Jesus began to preach.

Is that not a wonder, congregation? Meditate on this, pay close attention to it, take this word to heart. Think on these words. I hope your heart may hear this message so that you would be able to say, “O God, then it can also still be for me.” I hope that the light may yet break through for your wounded soul as you follow Jesus’ footsteps through Galilee.

John the Baptist’s mouth had been closed, but Jesus’ work continues. Jesus did not come to these people because they were worthy of it, but because they were so in need of it, according to the good pleasure of God.

## **2. The Necessity of Jesus’ Preaching**

What did Jesus come to do? He came to save sinners. We read in Mark 1, verses 14 and 15, “Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

He came to preach the joyful message. To preach is not just to tell a story or to describe something, but rather, to preach is to proclaim! To preach means to declare, to admonish, to invite, to warn, to bring the message to the door of people's hearts.

You may hear a nice story being told, possibly a very exciting one, but after a while you have forgotten all about it. But that is not the case with preaching. Preaching is not something which you listen to and then decide whether or not you will take notice of it.

To preach means to publicly declare the gospel. Jesus says, "Here I am, sent forth by My Father! I have a joyful message from My Father. Here is light in your darkness! Here is pardon for your guilt! Here is freedom from your captivity! In Luke 4, verses 18 and 19, we read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

Congregation, my words are inadequate, for I can only stammer about the depth, the breadth, and the height of God's good pleasure to preach the gospel there in that land of the Gentiles. And this message still resounds today as Christ continues His work by proclaiming the gospel in God's house. Today is still the acceptable year of the Lord, the day of salvation.

The possibility of being saved is declared to you today, made possible through Jesus Christ alone. It is absolutely not of your own doing. This was such a hard doctrine with which the teachers of the Jewish law burdened and oppressed the people of the Jews. They had rigid demands for what the people were allowed to do and what they were not allowed to do, but the people could never satisfy their demands.

Congregation, do you know something of this in your own life? Demands imposed on us, coming from outside us, or originating from within us--and so we can become so busy trying to make ourselves acceptable in the Lord's sight. Yes, we even ask, "Lord, have patience with me and I will pay Thee all." And so you have wearied yourself by working, toiling, and slaving all your life.

Now if you are honest with yourself, can you say that it was ever enough? Did it ever bring you peace? Then you will say that your unrest and apprehension have only become a heavier burden. All your tears, all your broken heartedness, and all your prayers were not sufficient. It was never deep enough or grievous enough. It is such a harsh and lengthy service in the "workhouse."

You must get out of the "workhouse," for Jesus never comes there. You will never find rest or peace there. Do you know what the fruit is of being in the "workhouse"? This; that you think you are improving yourself and becoming more worthy. The insufficiency of your own work, though, is learned in the land of sinners, as Galilee was called. Have you ever found Galilee, that land of sinners, in your own heart?

Through the discovering light of the Holy Spirit, we learn of our poverty and come to an end with all our own work. We come to the conclusion that with all our own toil and labour, we have not accomplished anything, but rather, we have only strayed farther away from the Lord. Then it becomes a total impossibility from our side, for we become a sinner before God, guilty of transgressing all His commandments. Then we become needy, miserable, helpless, faint-hearted, and worthless before God. Then we are stripped of all our self-righteousness. Nothing is left over other than a loathsome sinner, worthy to be cast away forever.

Congregation, is it not a wonder then that this is exactly where Jesus reveals Himself as the One and Only Saviour? This is where room is made for that blessed Mediator. He is sought of them that asked not for Him; He is found of them that sought Him not. To a nation that was not called by His Name, He has said, “Behold Me, behold Me!”

Is it not true that we often have low thoughts of the willingness and mercy of Jesus Christ? Don't we often think that we are more willing than He is? Many times we think that He is not willing to deal with such sinners as we are. Do not believe this lie from Satan. The Lord Jesus is sent to give freedom to the prisoners, to set free those who are held captive. Such is His work. Oh, how I wish that each one of you could see something of the riches of His mercy and faithfulness; of the willingness and all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ. He is powerful and able to break even such a heart as yours.

Maybe your heart is full of enmity towards the Lord because He, in His providence, has led you in deep and difficult ways. Perhaps you cannot and will not accept the Lord's dealings with you, and your heart is full of doubts and unbelief. Look then to His coming into Galilee and listen to His message: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). No one is too wicked, too sinful, too ungodly, has strayed too far off, is too old, or too young. There is mercy for the greatest of sinners. Let Him help you! You are welcome to come to Him with all your concerns, impossibilities, and strife. Let His grace be sufficient for you. Let His strength break the power sin has over you. It is His work to save sinners.

Maybe you think that for you it is too late, because your heart has become too hard. Maybe you think it is not possible for you anymore, because you have wandered so far in the ways of sin or your self-righteousnesses. You are ready to give up. Oh, congregation, I urge you to listen to the preaching of Jesus!

But let us first sing from Psalter 255: 3 and 4.

*To the Lord, such might revealing,  
Let us come with rev'ence meet,  
And before our Maker kneeling,  
Let us worship at His feet.  
He is our own God and leads us,  
We the people of His care;*

*With a shepherd's hand He feeds us  
As His flock in pastures fair.*

*While He proffers peace and pardon  
Let us hear His voice today,  
Lest, if we our hearts should harden,  
We should perish in the way;  
Lest to us, so unbelieving,  
He in judgment shall declare:  
Ye, so long My Spirit grieving,  
Never in My rest can share.*

### **3. The Contents of Jesus' Preaching**

What did the Lord Jesus preach? "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This was the same message which had been brought by John the Baptist. His preaching discovered (and discovers) people in their sinfulness. His preaching is penetrating, loving, and inviting--a preaching wherein the loving-kindness of the Lord's mercies are revealed.

The Lord could also have given us over to ourselves. He could justly have given us over to the hardness of our hearts. But the Lord has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he would repent and live.

Christ's heart was moved with compassion for the great multitude of people who followed Him. He saw them travelling on the way to eternal destruction. They had turned themselves away from Him and were following the world and sin. They were held captive by the chains of Satan, unable to deliver themselves. Worse, they were not even aware of the danger in which they were living. He saw them travelling on the way of self-righteousness, or on the way of unrighteousness. And He preached to them (and to us), saying, "Oh, people, do not go further on this way, but repent!" Literally, this means to turn around; stand still and realize that the way you are going will bring you to eternal destruction. If you continue on this way, eternal darkness will be your portion. You are caught in the chains of Satan. Do not believe him for he has deceived you. Repent and come unto Me and be saved.

The kingdom of heaven is at hand. It is within your reach. I am the door to that kingdom and I have the key. And those that come to Me, I will in no wise cast out. Oh, do not go further on that broad way which leads to eternal destruction. Stand still, return, return! Ponder My words and come to your senses. Compare what the world and Satan have to offer you with what I offer you. All the treasures of grace and life are in Me. And I am willing to give it all out of free grace, without money and without price.

Are you without wisdom? I am Wisdom. Do you not know how to become converted? I will instruct you in the way you must go. Are you bowed down under the burden of sin and guilt? Have you not one penny to pay for your mountain of guilt? I will pay it all for you. Do you have

nothing wherewith to wash yourself of the pollution of all your sins? I will wash you in My blood. Have you no garment to cover the shame of your nakedness? I have a garment which will cover all your shame. Are you weak and needy? I will strengthen and sustain you on the way which lies before you. Are you sorrowing after God and His communion? The broken communion with God can only be restored through Me. Do you lament because you have so much darkness and no light? I am the only and true Light. I am the Light of the world.

Oh, congregation, repent! The kingdom of heaven is at hand in and through the preaching of this joyful message. That kingdom is not of this world and you are standing outside of it. But the Lord Jesus says, “Turn unto Me.” You will not find true satisfaction in this world or in yourself. If your heart is still so attached to this world and all that is in it, then stand still a moment and think about what you would gain if you would forsake it all.

Maybe your question is, “Can we do that in our own strength? Is conversion not the one-sided work of God?” Absolutely, congregation, and thankfully so! If it would depend on us, it would never happen. And the Lord does not say that it happens without Him. He is the Only One who can give it. He is almighty and willing, compassionate and good-doing. How necessary it is that we learn this through the Holy Spirit!

I think it is so difficult for us because it is actually so easy. Congregation, boys and girls, to come to the Lord Jesus means we must lose our own crown: our pride and honour! And the reason why it becomes so difficult is because we think we can lay claim to the kingdom through our own good works. But in that way the door is and will remain closed.

We all know the history of how in Paradise, in the state of rectitude, we were able to serve the Lord. We were, so to speak, in the kingdom of heaven. The call to repentance was not necessary there. But through wilful disobedience we have forsaken the Lord. This fall continues to be lived out in our own lives. “Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us” (Psalm 2:3). No God, no master, nobody’s servant. We want to be a god to ourselves and do as we please. This is how we are and due to this, we have such difficulty accepting the preaching of Jesus: “Repent!” We try to find all kinds of excuses and in fact, accuse God.

But, congregation, the way to that kingdom is a way of death. I must lose my own honour. All that I have attained on my own I must let go. Then that proud and haughty Amorite must be pushed off his high pedestal. It is either one or the other: my kingdom or Jesus’ kingdom. We must become a sinner before God. Have you already laid down your weapons before this King? Have you bowed down in the dust before Him and begged Him to break asunder those strong bands which hold you? Have you begged Him to draw you by the power of His might?

Those poor, broken, guilty, and unworthy prisoners have come to know their own sin, but the desire for this King leads them to pray for His mercy. They become beggars at His throne of grace, imploring Him to help them. Their lost condition is uncovered to them through the Holy



Spirit and in their need they are driven to Him, who has been wounded for our transgressions and has become the propitiation for all our iniquities. They are uncovered sinners, having nothing left to help themselves and feeling unworthy to be helped. They have everything against them and see no way out anymore.

Is it not a wonder that for such a one the door of hope is opened? For someone who confesses, “The waves of my iniquities have gone over my head”? Yes, it is possible for prodigal sons and daughters. The prodigal son had nothing to offer but a wasted life. “I am no more worthy to be called thy son” (Luke 15:19). “But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him” (Luke 15:20). And the door was opened for him!

Is that not a wonder then, congregation, that for such a person the kingdom is opened? Is it not a wonder when in the darkness of our lost condition, the light begins to shine forth into our hearts? Is it not a wonder when our eyes are opened, and by faith we are enabled to see Him as that Conqueror, mighty to save, who has conquered Satan and has overthrown his dominion? *“Rich gifts to Him are offered, By men who did rebel, Who pray that now Jehovah, Their God with them may dwell”* (Psalter 183).

He has planted His banner on the wall of the city of Mansoul in order to gather such hopeless ones under His banner. They become penitent suppliants at His throne. Then they acknowledge their sin and unrighteousness, and beg for mercy and forgiveness. At His feet they will receive grace for grace. Those who come to Him, He will in no wise cast out. He will fulfill all their needs. “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength” (Isaiah 40:29). He clothes the poor, naked sinner with the robe of His righteousness. He is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. Yes, there is salvation in the communion with the Lord Jesus Christ--in Him alone.

Don't you think John the Baptist's heart rejoiced when he saw Jesus and pointed to Him as the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world? He had experienced this personally, so don't you think it was his delight to speak of Him? Oh, the strife will surely come. The more we may know of Christ, the more Satan will try to destroy that work.

To be given a glance of the King's countenance brings peace and gladness in their heart. Then there are times that they cry out from the bottom of their heart, “Lord, now I will never doubt again.” Then they think they will go forth from strength to strength. But if the Lord hides His face, they are terrified. They must learn to die to self and to live by faith out of Him alone, and this learning comes with the experience of anxious and fearful times.

But once in the kingdom they will never be cast out. It is the Lord's work and no one can snatch them out of His hands. This lies firm in the obedience of the blessed Mediator.

Therefore, that hope will never perish, although it may become weak because of the temptations and strife, which at times can be so strong that they cry out, *“Hide not Thy face from me, In wrath turn not away, My help and Saviour be, Forsake me not, I pray”* (Psalter 72).

But when the Lord arises to answer, He rebukes the wind and the waves--and the turbulent waters quiet down again. *“For lo, Jehovah hears the poor--and makes His pris’ners glad”* (Psalter 186). And, congregation, the Lord continues with His work. Today we hear the same Jesus, the same Word, to the same nation of sinful people, with the same message.

Congregation, boys and girls, we have come to the end of this sermon. We are travelling in the wrong direction if we continue on in the way we were born. This is a message for old and young, also for our children. You have heard it so many times already and today you hear again, *“Repent.”* You must be turned around.

And now you may be thinking, *“I cannot convert myself; the Lord needs to do that.”* And that is true. But would the Lord Jesus be mistaken when He says to you, *“Repent”*? Listen then to His Word. Bend your knees and confess to the Lord, *“I am not able to repent, but O Lord, wilt Thou give it? I cannot live on like this anymore, but I am not able to break the power of sin. O Lord, wilt Thou come to my help. Turn me. O Lord, deliver me from the bondage wherein Satan holds me fast. Lord, break Thou the power of my self-righteousness. Make me a sinner before Thee so that I will see who and what I am. Open my blind eyes that I may see the glory of Thy kingdom.”*

Oh, congregation, that the necessity of conversion would urge you to pray; that tonight you would not be able to sleep before you have heard His voice saying, *“The kingdom of God is at hand. Here I am with My mercy.”* You must experience this not only once, but time and again, for in the life of God’s children a daily conversion is so necessary. The Apostle Paul says, *“I die daily”* (1 Corinthians 15:31). This means that Paul also had need of a daily conversion. Every day we again wander away from the Lord, hewing out broken cisterns which hold no water. And every time we again must return to the Lord.

Congregation, today, now, the kingdom of heaven is near, but that will not remain so. The time is coming when all of God’s children, who have been given to the Lord Jesus, will have been gathered in, and then the door will be closed. Then the time of grace will be over. Then Jesus will no longer be preaching. However, you will see and hear Him one more time when He comes on the clouds of heaven, but then not as the Saviour, but as Judge. He will remind you of this sermon. You will be condemned to eternal darkness because you did not want Him as your King. *“Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes”* (Matthew 11:21).

Congregation, will this be your future? Will this be the verdict given to you? Oh, seek the Lord while He is to be found, call upon Him while He is near. The door is still open. This message may be the last one you will hear. And ... how many times have you heard it already? Know, “at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!” (Luke 19:42).

May the Lord bless this preaching to the extension of His kingdom and the salvation of your soul. Amen.

Closing: Psalter 325: 1 and 2

*Teach me, O Lord, Thy way of truth,  
And from it I will not depart;  
That I may steadfastly obey,  
Give me an understanding heart.*

*In Thy commandments make me walk,  
For in Thy law my joy shall be;  
Give me a heart that loves Thy will.  
From discontent and envy free.*