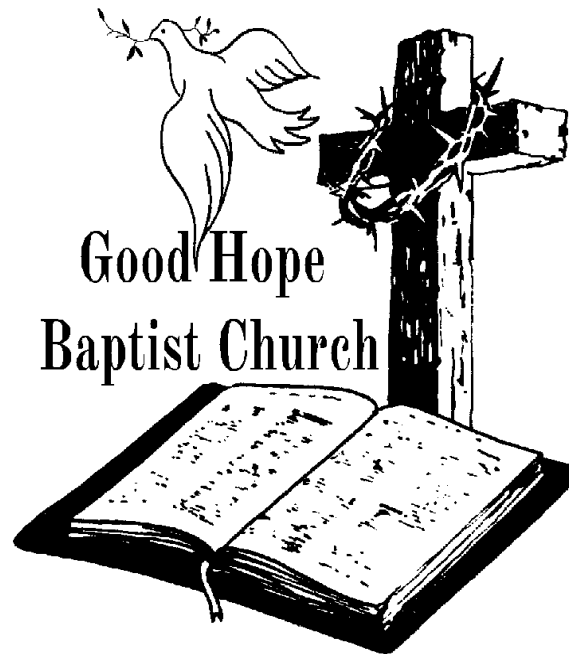


# "Then"

## To Be In The Kingdom, Walk With The King (Part 1)

Matthew 4:1



Living Together In The Love Of God

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**FOCAL Read Together** Matthew 4:1 **Then** was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

**Starting Illustration** If you have ever had a problem with your telephone or electric services you have had to call one of these "automated phone services". You know what I'm talking about - the kind where a computer comes on and the first thing it says is "**Press 1 if you are speaking English. Solomio dos en Espaniol al dia**". Then the next thing it does is take you through a series of choices that have absolutely nothing to do with what you're calling about. I particularly hate the systems that are trying to be *more personal*, telling you "**Say what service you want**". When I speak to these machines they rarely understand me, as my Southern drawl becomes more pronounced the more upset I get. Because I hate these machines I always look for an option where I can talk to a person - and am willing to hold to talk to them.

I called one company whose name I'll not mention, but whose initials are "**Verizon Wireless**". The following is true - the names have not been changed to protect anybody. I had heard that Verizon gave a discount to retired servicemen, so I was calling to see how I could get this discount. I went through the spiel with the computer, and waited for an operator. I got a nice young lady by the name of "**Samantha**". I told her that I had gone to the local Verizon office and was told that there was a form I needed to get and print on line, fill it out, and send it back to them for the discount. I had gone to their website, but no form was to be found. Samantha went to the website and, sure enough, couldn't find the

form. She could find the form on her computer, but couldn't email it to me because Verizon doesn't trust their employees enough to allow them to have an external email. After some time Samantha gave me another phone number to call, and said that I could get the form there. I thanked her, hung up, and called the number.

The number Samantha gave me was an automated Fax number. I do not have a Fax at home, nor do I want one. I know you can buy printers that are Fax machines, but I can count the number of times I've used a Fax in the last ten years on one hand. I don't want one. So I called Verizon again, worked my way through the automated computer, and this time got a representative by the name of "**Mark**".

Mark was - how can I say it - in the wrong business. I explained to him what I had done so far, what Samantha told me to do, and why it didn't work. Mark told me - like Samantha - that he could see the discount form on his computer, but he couldn't email it to me. So I asked Mark in the nicest way I could, "**Will you allow me to speak with a supervisor?**". Mark blew me away. First of all, he took it personally. "**Why do you need to speak to a supervisor?**" I told him, "**Mark, it has nothing to do with you. If I speak to a supervisor they may know something that neither you nor I know that can help me here. Please let me speak to a supervisor.**" Mark refused. He told me, "**A supervisor can't tell you any more than I've told you. I will not sit here on hold waiting for a supervisor!**" When I tried to talk, he would talk when I talked. Finally in exasperation I said, "**Mark, I'm going to hang up now. I'm not going to**

**argue with you. I will call back and talk to a supervisor.**" He said a few more rude things as I hung up, but I did what I said I was going to do.

I hung up and called Verizon back - this time somewhat upset. You can imagine. After going through the automated computer machine again (which I hate) a representative named "**Mel**" answered the phone. Now bear in mind, I'm upset. I've been on the phone *two hours* but I'm trying to keep my composure.

When **Mel** answers the first thing I notice is that he is *East Indian*. I have had dealings with East Indians and customer service before, so I immediately asked Mel "**May I speak with a supervisor?**" Mel asked, "**May I ask why you need a supervisor?**" I was just about ready to blow up, but I thought - no - give it a chance. So I told Mel what I had gone through, and ended by saying, "**So please, if you cannot help me, please give me to a supervisor.**" You know what Mel said?

**"I am so sorry you went through all of this. I will transfer you to a supervisor right away"**. And he did.

The Supervisor's name was **Salina**. I told Salina what I went through up to that point, and what I was looking for. In less than *one minute* Salina said, "**Why, that's no problem at all. I'll just print off a form and mail it to you**". After verifying my address Salina said, "**I am so sorry you went through this. Is there anything else I can do to help you?**" I told her, "**Yes you can. You can have a talk with Mr. Mark - that young man does not need to be answering phones for your company**".

Salina assured me that she would talk, not just with Mark, but with her whole team.

I talked with *four people* and invested *two and a half hours* of my life. Each and every one of us made a choice.

- **I chose to call, and keep calling**, until I got an answer.
- **Samantha chose to help me using her own resources** - and led me astray (but in a nice way)
- **Mark chose to refuse to help me**, and became angry when I wouldn't do it his way.
- **Mel chose to help me by giving me to the Supervisor**, who quickly gave me an answer

Life is about choice. The choices you make, they make you, and they shape your world.

If this phone company is going to "**Rule The Air**" then their employees need to choose to help the company meet those goals.

If our Church wants to see the **Kingdom of God expanded throughout our community and our world** then each member needs to understand *there is no standing on the sideline*.

Do we want a more moral America? Then it starts with me. Do we want to see more people following the Lord Jesus Christ? Then it starts with me.

## 1. My "Then" Will Depend On The Choices I Make

From the beginning of the Bible to the very last page, the Holy Scripture testifies that *life is all about choice*. God made us to be creatures of choice. One of my favorite shows that I used to watch - even as a child - was **Star Trek**. Loved that show. However, it's creator **Gene Roddenberry** was *not* a Christian. He said:

**"We must question the story logic {of the Bible} of having an all-knowing all-powerful God, who creates faulty Humans, and then blames them for His own mistakes."**

I've heard this statement before in varying ways from people who just don't get it. I have heard people say **"If God created Adam and Eve *perfect* then why did they sin? And if they sinned, why does God blame them for doing so, since *He made them that way*"? And if God made Adam and Eve *imperfect*, then why blame them for that?"**

You misunderstand the word "**perfect**". You see, our Perfect God did indeed make us perfect. The Bible says that when God made man He said:

**Genesis 1:26 .... Let us {the Triune God} make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.**

God made man perfect, but He did not make us *robots*. He made Adam and Eve perfect, but *perfect beings have absolute freedom of choice*.

Adam was perfect, Eve was perfect, the Garden they were in was perfect. They had the ability to freely choose to follow God or not. They could choose to follow God's design and plan for their lives, or not choose to do so. In order to make the Garden perfect, God gave Adam a *point of choice*. You see, it's not perfection if you're forced to be perfect.

**ILLUSTRATE** Let me put it this way. I think it would be perfect if every one who is on the membership roll of this Church were here every time the doors of the Church were opened. So I go out and buy several weapons - say submachine guns - and get several other members who think in like manner. On Sunday morning I and my storm troopers come to your house, knock the door down, and load you on the Church bus with several others under armed guard. We then bring you to Church, force where you sit, and fill the building up. Does that sound perfect to you? No, and it doesn't sound perfect to me, either. If I rob you of your free will and force you to do the right thing, there is nothing perfect about that. As a matter of fact, it is cultish - evil - and Satanic. God loves us, so He gives us choice, and freedom to choose.

The mark of perfection is the desire to freely walk with God.

The first Adam was given a choice to either walk with

God or else *not* walk with God. Adam chose to *not walk* with God. He chose instead to walk away from God, and to walk with Satan. The Bible says of Adam's choice:

**Romans 5:12** Wherefore, as by one man {Adam} sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

Adam made a choice, and his choice was not God's fault, nor was it Satan's fault. It was Adam's fault. The choice lay with him, and he made the choice.

**Romans 5:14** ... death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned {in the same manner as Adam did}.

God made Adam perfect. He made Eve perfect. He placed them in a perfect Garden. And they let the Devil make perfect fools out of them!

Now let's look at our text for today. Adam was made perfect, put in a perfect place. Jesus Christ is perfect. The Bible says of Jesus that:

**John 1:1, 14** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. .... {14} and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Adam was perfect, but willingly walked away from perfection, freely choosing to follow Satan. Now we see Jesus. He is eternal God Who **became flesh and dwelt among us**. He's perfect. He is God in the flesh, **the Second Adam**, walking among us. The Bible says that:

Hebrews 1:8-9 ... unto the Son {the Father} saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom. 9 Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

Jesus Christ is Perfect God. He is God in the flesh walking among us. He came to earth to correct what Adam did by walking away from God. So what happens with Jesus? Look at your text:

**FOCAL** Matthew 4:1 **Then** was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

Look at that first word, "**Then**". Then what? What happened to cause God to write "**then**"? To answer that, we look at our context. This "**then**" leads us to Chapter 3 of Matthew.

**CONTEXT** Matthew 3:1-2 **In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, 2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**

We see a wild man, a Prophet of God preaching the Kingdom. "**Repent! The Kingdom is at hand!**"

John has made choices in his life, and his choice was to follow God. He is **the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight"** (Matthew 3:3).

It's not easy to follow God. You have to step outside your comfort zone and do what He says no matter what.

**ILLUSTRATE** Look at John and the choices he made. He isn't wearing *Brooks Brothers* suits, nor is he wearing *Apostale* or *Calvin Klein* designer clothing. He is wearing **camel hair suits (Matthew 3:4) with leather britches**. John is eating - not at the *Ritz Carlton* nor at *Chez Lounge* but **locusts and wild honey**. He is not preaching in a *mega Church*, nor up on Broadway in the *Great White Way*. No Beloved, God **led him to a desert, near a deep place in the Jordan River**. John didn't have a sweetness and light message, but he spoke the Word of God with authority. Seeing the Pharisees he committed the cardinal preacher's sin - he called them out by name! "**O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath which is coming? Repent! Do not believe that your fine families, your connection to the Church will save you. God can raise up Church members out of rocks if He wants. The ax is coming - get right with God!**"

The choices that John made in turn made him famous. People came from miles around just to be baptized by John. But John chose not to let it puff him up - he walked with God. John said:

**CONTEXT** Matthew 3:11-12 **I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, Whose shoes I am not worthy**

**to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: 12 Whose fan is in his hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.**

John was looking for Jesus!

Let me ask you, what would have happened if John had chosen to *not* go into the wilderness? What if he had disobeyed God like Adam did, and chose his own path, his own sermon, his own way?

John would have never been part of what happened next. Remember that we started by focusing on the word "then" ...

**FOCAL** Matthew 4:1 **Then** was Jesus ...

Look what happens in your context.

**CONTEXT** Matthew 3:13 **Then** cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

Look at that, Beloved. **THEN**. Say that with me, **THEN!** John did what God told him to do, and **then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John to be baptized of Him**. The **THENS** in your life matter!

When you obey God, you position yourselves to be blessed by God. Obey God, **THEN**. Disobey God, **THEN**. The choice you make makes your **THEN**.

Go back to Adam and Eve for a moment. Adam was given a choice to follow God or follow Satan. There is no fence sitting, by the way. You either are following God or you are following Satan. You are either obeying God, or you are obeying Satan. The Bible says that Satan told Eve:

**Genesis 3:5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.**

There's that word again, "**then**". Satan said, "**Follow me, THEN I'll make you like gods. Follow God and you will never reach your potential**".

Adam and Eve followed the **THEN** of Satan - and brought sin, corruption, and death on all of creation. They chose imperfection, then their choice controlled them.

John the Baptist stepped outside of his comfort zone - and was blessed because of it. But Jesus Christ *also* stepped outside of His comfort zone in order to follow God. You see, Jesus voluntarily left the glory of Heaven - the throne and the glorified praise of the angels - in order to come to this earth for us.

**CONTEXT** Matthew 3:13 **Then** cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

He stood before John and said, "**I've come to be baptized**". You see, in order for Jesus to unravel the

mess that Adam got us into by his bad choices, Jesus had to make God's choices. He had to obey God. Now Jesus - like all Perfect Beings - had absolute Free Will. Consider this:

The Eternal God Who created Heaven and Earth took upon Himself humanity. He CHOSE to do this. He stood before John and said "**Baptize Me**". John - bless his heart - said "**I have need to be baptized by You, O Lord, and You come to me to be baptized?**" Jesus said, "**Allow it to be done. I MUST fulfill all righteousness.**"

Listen Beloved: Righteousness, like Love, must be DONE. It's not just a feeling - it is an action. If you love, you will DO love no matter how you feel about it. If you are righteous you will DO righteousness, no matter how you feel about it. **Jesus had to fulfill all righteousness.**

John baptizes Jesus.

**CONTEXT** Matthew 3:15 .... **Then** he {John} suffered him {Jesus}.

There's that "**then**" again. John "**suffered**" Jesus. He obeyed God, and baptized Jesus. THEN. Right after Jesus was baptized the Spirit of God came to Jesus, and God the Father spoke:

**CONTEXT** Matthew 3:17 .... **This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.**

Because John chose to follow God, he was blessed and not only got to meet, but also *baptized Jesus*. Who else in history can claim that wonderful event as their own? Because Jesus Christ was obedient and, following God, went to John in the desert to be baptized, God the Father said "**This is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.**"

Now I know that Jesus Christ is uniquely the Son of God. He was born once of a virgin, but never born as God. He is, was, and will always be Almighty God. I know that. But Beloved, we see a principle here that we can apply to our lives.

If you have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, if you have given your life unto Him, **then** the Bible says:

**Galatians 4:4-7** **But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, 5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. 6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. 7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.**

Jesus Christ is God's **Only Begotten Son**, but we who believe on Jesus are **God's adopted Sons**. We are **joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17)**.

The Son of God was honored by the Father's declaration,

**"This is My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased"**. As an adopted Son of God I want to hear my Lord say of me,

**"This is My beloved adopted son, in Whom I am well pleased."** If I want to hear this - either now or in eternity - then I must choose to follow the Lord moment by moment and day by day, rejecting Satan and his ways.

## **2. The Choice I Make And The "Then" I Take Is My Fault, And Not God's**

The first Adam disobeyed God, and followed Satan. When God came into the Garden Adam - like many of us have done - began to play **"the blame game"**.

**Genesis 3:11 {God} said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?**

Notice Adam did not say "yes" or "no". He *deflected* the question by passing blame on to the woman.

**Genesis 3:13 The LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.**

We live in a day where there is no accountability. People make choices, and then blame the "THEN" on someone else. It's hereditary, I guess - something we got from Adam.

Adam passed blame to the woman, and Eve to the Devil. The problem with passing blame is that God doesn't buy it. The message of the Bible is **"repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand"**.

**ILLUSTRATE** A man is waiting to cross a busy intersection through dense traffic. He sees a small interval, and chooses to gun his engine and try to race through. He is hit by an oncoming car carrying a family of four, including two small children. He is grievously injured, but the children are killed. **"How could God have allowed that to happen?"** A man and a woman, violating God's Law, are sexually intimate. The man has been with many others and, following this time, the woman is now with child. The man abandons her, and she bears the child. Sadly she discovers that both she as well as the child have contracted HIV. **"How could God have allowed that to happen?"** A Christian works every day next to a man, a friend, who does not know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. They work together for several years, but the Christian is silent about his faith. He never invites his friend to Church - it's so uncomfortable to tell someone about the Lord! One day he comes to work, but his friend isn't there. Where is he? He finds out that over the weekend his friend took his own life with a gun. Did the man leave this life without Jesus? **"How could God have allowed that to happen?"** A parent, busy with work, never has time to be with her child. The parent comes home one day but Lilly isn't there. There's a knock on the door. Lilly left school that day with several friends who, bored, decided to experiment with drugs. Lilly thought she could fly, so she stepped off of the

tenth floor balcony at her friend's apartment. **"How could God have allowed that to happen"?**

You sit and listen to the preacher preach. He pleads with you. What's down in the well comes up in the bucket. What's down in your heart comes out in your actions and shows on your face.

The reason many have crow's feet on their face is because they have been laying like carrion on the highway of life. Get up, look up, and start walking the highway to Heaven, following Jesus to glory!

Adam made a bad choice, and by his choice the world fell into sin. But God was not satisfied with that. A man named **Joseph** found out that his bride to be was with child. God told Joseph, and us, that:

**CONTEXT** Matthew 1:21-23 {Mary} shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name **JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.** 22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 23 **Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.**

God was not happy with our "then", so **Jesus - God with us** - came to pay for our sins. I am a sinner, and you are a sinner. We are the way we are because Adam made a poor choice. But it doesn't have to end there. Jesus Christ came to this earth to pay for our sins. If you have believed on Jesus as Lord and Savior then the Scripture

says that He:

**Colossians 2:14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;**

Jesus Christ did what He was supposed to do. He freely paid for our sins. Now you, dear friend, must make a choice, and the choice you make will not be someone else's fault. Jesus has said:

**John 14:6 .... I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.**

Jesus Christ is the Only Way unto God the Father. If you repent of your sins and freely choose to come to Him, **THEN** you shall be saved! Jesus has said:

**John 7:37-38 .... If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. 38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.**

Are you thirsty for more out of life? Are you thirsty for God? **THEN** come unto Jesus Christ and drink. Believe on Him, follow Him. If you will freely choose Jesus, **out of you shall flow rivers of living water.** Your choice effects your **THEN**. Jesus also said:

**John 6:35 .... I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.**

**ILLUSTRATE** I heard the other day that we are designed by the Law of Threes. We can go *three minutes* without air before we die of asphyxiation. We can go *three days* without water before we die of dehydration. We can go *three weeks* without food before we die of starvation. That is no coincidence. You see, *three* is the number of God in the Scripture. May I say that you cannot go *three seconds* into eternity and get into Heaven without a surrendered faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. And your life won't be worth *three cents* unless you make it a habit to follow God and DO His Word.

**God doesn't want you to make GOOD choices - He wants you to make GOD choices. Choose to follow God. You can *never* lead, nor even *exceed* in this life, until you learn to follow God!**

If you hear the Preacher and - God forbid - die rejecting Christ, it is not God's fault. It is your fault. God has done all He can to save you, and all of salvation is invested in what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on Calvary.

If I have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, THEN glory in Heaven awaits me.

If I follow the Lord Jesus Christ in this life, THEN I will be blessed of God and enter the Promised Land.

If I refuse the Lord Jesus Christ THEN I will suffer the consequences - and it is not God's fault.

May God touch your hearts with His Word.



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**1. My "Then" Will Depend On The Choices I Make**

Genesis 1:26 \_\_\_\_\_

God made man perfect, but He did not make us *robots*. He made Adam and Eve perfect, but *perfect beings have absolute freedom of choice*.

Romans 5:12; Romans 5:14; John 1:1, 14; Hebrews 1:8-9; Matthew 4:1; Matthew 3:1-2; Matthew 3:3; Matthew 3:11-12 \_\_\_\_\_

Let me ask you, what would have happened if John had chosen to *not* go into the wilderness? What if he had disobeyed God like Adam did, and chose his own path, his own sermon, his own way?

Matthew 3:13; Genesis 3:5; Matthew 3:13 \_\_\_\_\_

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