

Notes for the Ones Called Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: June 21, 2015

A Light to Galilee

by Dan Trygg

“Now when He heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; ¹³ and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: ‘The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a Light has dawned.’ From that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Change-your-perception, for the Kingdom of heaven has come.’ ¹⁸ And walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ ²⁰ And they immediately left the nets, and followed Him.”
Matthew 4:12-20

From the gospel of John, we saw that John the Baptist and Jesus were *both* preaching at the same time, in *different locations*. John tended to stay by the fords of the Jordan. Most of Jesus’ ministry in John 1-5 was west of the Jordan, in the countryside of Judea, in Samaria, in the central hill country of Galilee, and back to Judea. As we return to the gospel of Matthew, we see **the ministry of Jesus blossoms even more after the arrest of John the Immerser** (4:12). Matthew begins with Jesus leaving Nazareth, apparently after His rejection and near murder by the townspeople of His youth (4:13; cf. Lk. 4:16-30). **He relocates to Capernaum, the city of Peter and Andrew** (Mk. 1:29). **This became His new hometown, and the base of operations for His Galilean ministry.** He may even have lived in Simon Peter’s home (cf. Mk. 1:29-39). This would have saved Him the expense of supporting a separate house, and would also have allowed for even *more* time with some of His closest disciples. **Capernaum thus became privileged to behold many of the miracles of Jesus.** (This city later came to be among those denounced by Him for their unrepentant hearts in the face of such clear and amazing revelations [Matt. 11:20-24]. Where much is given, much will be required [cf. Lk. 12:48]. The *total obliteration* of this ancient city reminds us that *God is serious about this*. Those who *reject truth will be rejected* and come to *nothing*. We *also* will be accountable for what *we* are exposed to, and what *we know* of the activity of God in our lives.)

Matthew saw this change in location as a fulfillment of OT prophecy. Writing to Jewish Christians, this was important evidence to show that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Fulfilled prophecy indicates that God has the interest and ability to be actively involved in the lives of human beings. He *alone* knows and declares the future *centuries in advance*, and has such control in history to bring these events to pass with such accuracy and clarity (Isa. 41:21-24; 44:6-8; 46:8-11). God chose to describe details about the birth, life and mission of the Messiah centuries ahead of time, so that people could recognize Him when He would show up on the scene. Such **prophetic “zipcoding”**, if you will, **becomes even more compelling as a line of evidence as the number of these examples increase, and the details of these predictions are more specific, ...beyond the possibility of being coincidental.** This is already the seventh example of fulfilled prophecy which Matthew has brought to our attention, in the space of four chapters (cf. 1:22,23; 2:4-6,15,17-18,23; 3:1-3; 4:13 -- There are *over 65* allusions to the OT regarding details of Jesus life in Matthew!)

To explain the background for this seventh prophetic fulfillment (4:13), Matthew tells his readers that Capernaum is located “by the Sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali”. Zebulun and Naphtali were two of Jacob’s twelve sons. Two of the tribes of Israel were descended from them. When Joshua led the Israelites into the land, these two tribes were given allotments to the north and west of the Sea of Galilee. At the time the prophecy was originally given (Isa. 9:1-7), **Assyria had conquered northern Israel and had taken the majority of the populace away** (II Kg. 25:29). **To make matters worse, the Assyrian king introduced other captive peoples into the area. This gave rise to the label “Galilee of the Gentiles”**, referring to the other nations living there. This tragic history is alluded to by Isaiah, when he said, “There will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and Naphtali *with contempt*...” (Isa. 9:1). These references to “gloom”, “contempt”, and “darkness” (in vs. 2) convey the defeated, depressive state of those territories within what had once been the prosperous kingdom of Israel. **God had allowed them to come to ruin because of their sin and lack of obedience to Him.** Some 200 years later, some Jews began to return, but they settled all over the countryside. The neat tribal divisions of the past were gone. **At the time of Jesus, people from various other tribes had settled willy-nilly throughout**, so any reference to tribal areas was based upon *past* historical reckonings, not on the current populace. **The heavy mixture of Gentiles, who actually outnumbered the Jews, caused the Jews of southern Palestine to hold Galilee and Galileans in particular disregard**, so the contempt of God *still* seemed to be upon this area. One side effect of this attitude of superiority was that the hyper-religious folk tended to gravitate southward, toward Judea. **Those living with the stigma of being Galileans tended to be a bit more open and humble, by contrast.**

Another feature mentioned in this prophecy was “the Way of the Sea”. *This was the name of the main transportation route from Egypt to Damascus and beyond.* This international trade route came along the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee, which greatly increased the prosperity of the region, and made it a center for trade. **Capernaum was situated right on this highway**, which was probably the reason that Peter and his family had moved there from Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44). What better place to catch or peddle fish than in a cosmopolitan marketplace like Capernaum, with endless travelers passing through each day? In Bethsaida, there would have been a *local* business opportunity, but **in Capernaum, there was no end to opportunity to sell a food commodity like fresh or dried fish.** What was undoubtedly true in Peter’s case was multiplied many times over, making Capernaum a large city, complete with a customs office and a detachment of Roman soldiers. This prosperity made the entire region of Galilee one of the most densely populated areas, especially along the western side of the Sea of Galilee.

Moving to Capernaum was an important strategic move for Jesus, as well. *His ministry would take place in a densely populated area, with Jews that tended to be a bit more open-minded.* Also, Gentiles in the area could not help but *take notice* of His activities. **The cosmopolitan nature of the area had already broken down many barriers to the Gentile world.** His disciples from that region would have learned not only the Hebrew-Aramaic language spoken by the Jews of Judea, but also the everyday Greek language used by the Gentiles in Galilee and the travelers along the caravan routes. **Being right along the Way of the Sea not only made travel easy for Him, but also would facilitate the spread of the gospel message later on.** (People on mission for God in the Bible almost always go to cities, population centers, or along important highways. We need to think *strategically*, with *ministry* as *our* focus.)

There were two strategic activities that Jesus began to focus on in earnest in His Galilean ministry. They were (1.) public proclamation; and (2.) replacement preparation. We see in verse 17 that Jesus was proclaiming a message that was similar to John the Baptist’s, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” Unlike John, however, **Jesus followed up His preaching with demonstrations that made clear that the Kingdom was here.** The signs, wonders and miracles, which *God gave Him to perform* (cf. Acts 2:22; 10:38; Lk. 5:17) were done to attest that the message He was proclaiming was real and true (Jn. 10:37,38; 20:30,31). Jesus departed from John in another way, too. **John stayed out in the wilderness, preaching to passersby and whoever came to listen. Jesus, however, kicked it up a notch. He went to the people.** He went *everywhere*, teaching in the synagogues and proclaiming the good news in every conceivable place. Wherever He went, He was *also* healing every sort of disease, sickness and malady of the body or soul. Great crowds began to follow Him, and **His travels took Him farther and farther afield, until He had preached and demonstrated the Kingdom on both sides of the Jordan, from the upper reaches of Galilee to southern Judea** (vs. 25). This was *a saturation campaign*, a sweeping through the countryside *making known that God was visiting His people.* He was calling them to a change-of-perception and to reorient their lives *toward* God. At the same time, He was praying for the sick, and casting out demons. The changed lives and answers to prayer *demonstrated* the power of God’s Kingdom. ***This preaching campaign brought the great Light out into this darkened land, giving them the hope, good news, and the joy of the Kingdom of God.***

The other strategic move that Jesus began to focus on in earnest was the calling and training of disciples, men who would learn to do as He did. Jesus knew that in order to accomplish His mission, *He had to prepare a group of people* who could faithfully *carry on* and *expand* the work where and when He could not. It is vital to note carefully Jesus’ methodology and purposes, so *we* can learn from them and keep them in perspective. **It was not enough to have a saturation campaign. Getting the word out was not sufficient. More** was required. **Jesus was looking for lives to be changed and mobilized for the Kingdom of God!** There needed to be *personal follow-up training and application.* **Being a disciple was more than nodding one’s head to the message. It required an active pursuit of God.** We have seen that men like Peter, Andrew, James and John had *already* been involved in following Jesus. They had been taking time away from work to *travel with Him, helping* in His campaigns. They had *already been spending extended time with Him.* **The needs of the growing ministry, and their personal calling and training was now demanding more.** They were being recruited to become replacements for Jesus, to carry the **ministry to another level.** Now, Jesus comes along the seashore as they are working, and calls them. “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” The Greek words are more expressive, “Come *here* after Me...”, or even “Come *now* after Me...” **The context of Jesus’ call is important in order to more clearly grasp what He wanted them to do.** Especially if Jesus was staying at Peter’s house, the fact that *He came to their workplace* to issue this call cannot be ignored. He did not wait until they came home from work. **He sought them out at work to call them to leave their job behind them immediately to be trained for a new vocation, fishing after men.** Just as *He* had left *His* employment to fully devote *Himself* to the work of the Kingdom, so now the time had come for *them* to join Him on a full-time basis. **What was He calling them to? They were called to follow Him. What would be the end result? He would make them fishers of men. The objective was to learn how to “catch people” for the Kingdom.**