

Prayer

Grant peace this day, Lord Jesus Christ, to our families and all we love. Our lives are vested in their happiness, and we rejoice to see in them the fruits of family love and care. Help us forgive them when they hurt us; and may we always accept them by trusting that they are in Your hands, not ours, and in You they find their fulfilment, not in us. Through Jesus Christ we pray: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: the sick in mind

Pray today for those who are facing the prospect of mental illness because of stress, anxiety or pressure. Pray for any people you know who are off work with such illness.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the work of teachers in schools and colleges
- Pray for those worst affected by rising food prices and poverty
- Pray for recent converts to Christ

Meditation

Come, Lord Jesus, come!

Break this faulty, evil world of ours
by Your glorious Gospel of peace and love;
Transform the hearts and souls and minds
of those who have been entrapped by sin.
Remove the stubborn selfishness
which has robbed the world of its heart today;
Root out the foolish, perverse attitudes
through which Satan gains his footholds everywhere.
Forgive our tired and repentant hearts,
restore us now, and our hurting world around us;
Wipe clean the sins we know about,
and teach us more of the moral truth of Your Word.
Restore the life of Christ within your servants,
to freshen up their spirits and lift their eyes up higher!
Bring back the outrageous zeal of youth again,
inspiring us to all the greater things of heaven!

Come Lord Jesus, come!

Bible Study - Matthew 4:12-17

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he went back to Galilee. ¹³ He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum, by the sea, in the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ to fulfil what the prophet Isaiah had said: ¹⁵ "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; ¹⁶ the people who lived in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who lived there under the shadow of death, a light has been lit."

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Review

This short text is a linking passage which takes us from Jesus' experiences of baptism and temptation in the wilderness (3:4:1-11) together with the beginning of His ministry and the calling of the first disciples (4:18f.). However, Matthew does not waste any words! This may be a grief passage but it contains important information about the whereabouts of John the Baptist and Jesus (4:12,13), an important quote from the prophet Isaiah which explains why Jesus began His ministry in the north and gives a prophecy about the ministry of the Messiah (4:14,15,16) and contains one of the pearls of the New Testament, Jesus' famous nine word sermon (4:17)! There is no lack of interest here!

John had been baptising in the Jordan probably in its southern regions just above the Dead Sea, and this allowed for easy access from the surrounding countryside and also the important region of Judea which contained Jerusalem (see 3:5f.). After Jesus' baptism and his temptations, presumably in the nearby desert regions of Transjordan or perhaps the deserts of Judea further south, he went north back to Galilee. All four evangelists record that Jesus' ministry began in Capernaum, a town on the north side of the Lake of Galilee. Nazareth, his family home, was on the south of the lake, in the tribal lands of Zebulun, whereas Capernaum was in the tribal lands of Naphtali further north, and Matthew spotted the connection between these places and the prophesy of Isaiah.

Centuries before, Isaiah had prophesied that the Lord would restore the people of God by liberating 'the people who walked in darkness' (Isaiah 9:2a and Matt 4:16). Isaiah lived at a time when the northern Kingdom of Israel was invaded by the Assyrians (721BC) because of their sins and abandonment of God, but he refused to believe that God could be unfaithful, and daringly prophesied that contrary to all human logic, the Lord would establish a 'light' in the 'darkness' (Is 9:2) because of the coming of a child born to be King (Is 9:6f.)! Jesus therefore fulfilled this prophecy by beginning his ministry in the north of the country; something that was not expected according to other Messianic prophecies which generally linked the Messiah with Jerusalem. However, by so doing Jesus identified with all of Isaiah's prophecies, and as his life unfolds in Matthew's Gospel, we will see more and more connections between Jesus and the prophecies of Isaiah.

In addition, it was perhaps important for Jesus to begin his ministry in Capernaum, away from the family home. His new work was a break with his own childhood and upbringing, and God's mission needed to start without the temptation to go home to help his father in the carpentry business, or having to account for his actions to his mother, even if he was in his late 20's! The ministry Jesus began was an independent and itinerant ministry wandering from place to place, and the ties of home had to be left behind. Later, this caused friction with his family (Matt 12:46f.), but what He did was essential for the Gospel.

It should come as no surprise to us that Jesus' first sermon was basically the same one preached by John; 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!' Jesus did not need to write a new sermon, as preachers do today, He had a message and this message was the plain truth. It had always been God's intention to repair the breach between Himself and the world and between Himself and the people He had created; a breach caused by sin and evil (see Gen 3). Through centuries He had revealed His intent through His people, the People of Israel, but now God had come into the world to change it forever through His chosen Messiah, Jesus. God's Kingdom and rule, the 'Kingdom of Heaven' was now real and tangible through the presence of the Messiah in the world, and the sermon Jesus preached invited all who would hear the message of God's open-hearted love to respond to it with repentance.

The time had come for God to work in the world through His Messiah. It was God's time; Jesus was His Messiah, and although a great deal was still to be done and Jesus had much to do; salvation was now 'on offer'!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Do you have trouble understanding the geography of the Bible? Spend a little time with a Bible map to ensure you know the places mentioned in this text.
2. Discuss in your group what you believe verse 16 to mean in the context of the beginning of Jesus' ministry.
3. What do you think of when you hear the sermon 'Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand'?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

This is a profoundly moving part of Jesus' ministry. How much of this had been formulated in Jesus' mind beforehand we do not know, but it was only after the coming of the Holy Spirit that Jesus felt able to preach in power and with authority. It is my constant prayer that when I preach, God will give me words by His Holy Spirit which will truly reflect the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *How important has it been to you to break ties in order to move on. Reflect on those times in your life when you have had to say goodbye to one 'life' and begin another.*
- *If you had only one sermon to preach and only one sentence to say it, what would it be? Try writing this out, and then if you are a preacher then use it as the basis for a sermon!*

Final Prayer

Lord God, gracious Father:
I offer myself in quietness,
I give myself to Your work,
I constantly seek Your will,
I long to know more of You,
I trust You for everything,
I will not cease to love You,
And I praise Your Holy Name:
AMEN