

## Prayer

Great God of Wonders, display Your power amongst Your people, I pray. Do whatever miracles You will, O Lord, but perform the greatest miracle of all, and save the souls of people, many people; and may we who call on our name, be faithful to the task. Lord Jesus, our Saviour. AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: the sick in mind

*Pray for those whose faculties are not what they once were, and struggle with knowing that they will not recover the memory, wit and mental agility they once had. Pray with care.*

### On-going prayers

- Praise God for church fellowship
- Give thanks for the work of teachers in schools and colleges
- Pray for those worst affected by rising food prices and poverty

## Meditation

What truth is there behind Your love, O God?  
A love that made the world and bled when all seemed lost;  
then triumphed in a plan of unsurpassed beauty  
sending Jesus to our world to save the lost,  
and taking all the world's rejection on the Cross  
that love might conquer death and show itself the victor!  
O truth which only finds a home in you and me  
because our past and present make us ever lost;  
Create our future's hope in love's eternity!

## Bible Study - Matthew 4:18-25

<sup>18</sup> As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> "Follow me," he said to them, "and I will enable you to fish for people!" <sup>20</sup> They left their nets straight away and followed him.

<sup>21</sup> As he went on from there, he saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. <sup>22</sup> They left the boat and their father straight away, and followed him.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus went around all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the Kingdom and healing all kinds of disease and sickness among the people. <sup>24</sup> His fame spread throughout Syria, and they brought to him all who were sick, suffering from various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. <sup>25</sup> Large crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

## Review

Jesus had preached his great sermon 'Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand' (4:17) and the stage was now set for the beginning of His ministry. Today's reading falls neatly

into two halves, with the calling of the first disciples coming first, and a description of Jesus' early ministry in Galilee after that.

It was common for Rabbi's in the first century, to have a band of 'followers' who gathered around them and learned from what they said and did. Some think Jesus established his ministry in this fashion, but this is not so. Those who followed the Rabbi's did so of their own volition, and looking after their own personal affairs; but in our passage today Jesus selected the four disciples Himself, which is something a Rabbi would not have done. Jesus knew what He was doing and the people He needed. Simon and Andrew (4:18,19), and then James and John (4:21,22) all responded immediately His call. This immediate response was important for Jesus, and later on He said how important it was to the Kingdom of God (Matt 8:21, 10:37, 19:29).

In the conversation with Simon and Andrew, Jesus said the famous words 'I will enable you to fish for people!' (more well known as 'I will make you fishers of men'). The translation I have given gives a different emphasis for what Jesus said to that of more well known versions, because it was Jesus' intent to enable the disciples to do the work of the Kingdom of God rather than just tell them what to do and leave them to it, or in some way 'make' them do what He wanted. Although the ideas of evangelism which are evoked by this passage are significant, Jesus' method of working with authority, but with the attitude of a servant is highly significant (see also Matt 20:26, 23:11). Even at this early stage of the Gospel, Jesus was turning the expected values of the world upside down.

Of the four disciples, three would become the 'inner circle' of Jesus' disciples; Simon (later called Peter, the recognised leader) and James and John. Andrew retained a special place amongst the disciples as one who sometimes appeared together with this close inner group, but who also drew people towards Jesus on a number of occasions during Jesus' ministry (John 6:8, 12:22). The remarkable thing is that all four were the first to do what countless millions have since done, which is to leave everything and follow the Lord, with no conditions or assumptions about what lay ahead. It was a supreme sacrifice and adventure!

Verses 23 to 25 are a summary which is placed here as a guide to Matthew's Gospel. From the beginning of the next chapter we read the great 'Sermon on the Mount' (chapters 5 to 7), and Matthew needed to make sure that his readers knew that Jesus' ministry was a demonstration of the Gospel as well as the teaching of it! In a number of places, Jesus is reported as having a ministry of 'teaching', 'preaching' and 'healing' (4:23, see also Matt 10:1,7; 28:20, Luke 4:18ff, 13:11 for example), so these three ministries are very important. It is unwise to give any one of them priority over the other, as all of them are equally important. Jesus came into the world preaching the Kingdom of God (4:17), then He also explained His preaching through His teaching (as in the Sermon on the Mount), and He demonstrated the Kingdom of God by works of power and authority, including healing (here and chapters 8,9, for example).

The emphasis in our passage today however is on works of healing and power. It is clear from the precise but pastoral manner in which the healings described that the miracles were not the personal privilege of those who wanted Jesus' attention; they were a demonstration of the Kingdom. It was of course natural that those who suffered came from the entire region when word got around of Jesus' ministry, but still the focus of the story is not on the miracles themselves but on the effectiveness of the ministry, and the 'good news of the Kingdom' (4:23).

All this may be simple to say, but hides a powerful truth. The Kingdom of God has been preached and taught so that the need for salvation from sin and death in this world is met. In this life, many of us need physical healing, either because of the nature of the world with all its diseases and tragedies, or because of our sin. But basically, we all need salvation above all else. In God's eyes, our earthly healing is a gift, a touch of the Kingdom of God in the midst of life, and part of the salvation which He longs to complete in us through Jesus. As one who experiences chronic illness myself, I share the experience of many who know

that God has healed them sometimes yet not at all the time, at least, not yet! There is one thing I do know, however, and this is that Jesus has saved me from all evil, sin and death. This can never be taken from me because it is the mark of the Kingdom of God to which I have responded with faith; and I always pray for and look forward to His healing.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Response to Jesus in this story is immediate and complete. Should that be so for everyone who calls themselves a Christian? If so, how?
2. Discuss what Jesus might have 'preached' apart from the literal words of Matthew 4:17.
3. Is it important to demonstrate the Kingdom of God by the healing of diseases today? What other ways may the Kingdom come in power in our midst?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*This is a wonderful story at the beginning of the Gospel, and most of us can imagine ourselves in the story, perhaps wishing we were the one Jesus called. But we are the ones Jesus calls now! Let us take up this privilege with joy!*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Talk to as many people as possible about how they became a Christian, and see what similarities you can find with this passage of scripture.*
- *There is much debate in the church and in society as well about the best size for a small group of leaders. Jesus appeared to select three as the small close group, then 12 and then the larger 70. Is this the best way to organise a world movement? Discuss this with a friend.*

## Final Prayer

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for giving us in scripture the story of the first disciples. May we follow their example and trust you completely; and may our lives be completely changed for the better by Your call. Lead us On, Lord Jesus. AMEN