

THE KINGDOM OF LIGHT ARRIVES

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By Pastor Stan
Matthew 4:12-17

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-- The fastest 0-60 time by a production (street) car is by the Porsche 918 Spyder, which has done that in 2.2 seconds. On the other hand, it can take a freight train 1-2 minutes for the entire train to just start moving and more than 10 minutes for the train to reach 60 mph.

-- The start up of Jesus' earthly ministry was more like the freight train than the Porsche. But God's time schedule is always perfect - it's never too fast or too slow.

-- Two weeks ago we saw the inauguration of Jesus' earthly ministry when He was baptized by John the Baptist. Jesus' commitment to fulfilling Father's plans was immediately tested by 40 days of fasting in the Judean wilderness and by Satan's three-fold Temptation.

-- Now, in today's passage Matthew will tell about the beginning of Jesus' preaching ministry.

Cf., 4:12-17

-- I want us to examine three important aspects of Jesus' preaching ministry that are presented to us here in this passage - the when, the where and the what of that ministry.

I. When Jesus Started His Preaching Ministry (vv. 12, 17)

A. Following the Arrest of John the Baptist

-- Jesus began His preaching ministry after the arrest of John the Baptist. Matthew 4:11 is the end of Jesus' Temptation in the wilderness, and Matthew 4:12 is the arrest of John. Between those two verses approximately one year has gone by - the first year of Jesus' earthly ministry, which means that the first year of Jesus' ministry happened in relative obscurity, so obscure that the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) skip over it entirely - say nothing about anything that happened during that year.

B. The First Year of Jesus' Ministry in John's Gospel

1. If you want to see what happened during the first year of Jesus' ministry, the year following Jesus' Baptism and Temptation, you need to go to the Gospel of John. From 1:19-4:42 John records the events that took place that first year.

2. What we discover in reading that passage is that the first year of Jesus' ministry was no so much a year of obscurity as a year of transition - a year in which God's spotlight is fading on John and rising on Jesus.

-- At the beginning of that year John the Baptist is at the height of his popularity - everybody in Israel knows who John the Baptist is. Jesus, however, is almost completely unknown outside of His hometown of Nazareth. All of that is about to change.

John 3:26-30 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness - look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." **<sup>27**
</sup>John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.**<sup>28**
</sup>You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'
<sup>29
</sup>The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. **<sup>30**
</sup>He must increase, but I must decrease."

3. John's Decrease & Jesus' Increase

a. John's Decrease

-- The first year of Jesus' ministry is a year of John's decrease and Jesus' increase. Throughout that year, John the Baptist continued to preach and baptize, but John also started to point people to Jesus as the promised Messiah.

b. Jesus' Increase

-- The increase in Jesus' ministry occurred through a series of events described by the Apostle John in chapters 1-4 of his Gospel. Those events include:

? The call of Jesus' first Disciples

? The wedding at Cana in Galilee, where Jesus performed His first recorded miracle, turning water into wine

? Jesus' attendance at the Feast of Passover in Jerusalem and the first cleansing of the Temple (driving out the money changers and those selling sacrificial animals) - an act that Jesus would repeat at the end of His ministry.

? Jesus' meeting with the seeking Pharisee named Nicodemus, and

? Jesus' meeting with the sinful woman at the well in Samaria

-- Those are the events that occurred during the first year of Jesus' ministry, a transition year in which both Jesus and John the Baptist are active. That transition comes to an end when Herod Agrippa arrests and imprisons John the Baptist; John will never leave Herod's prison and will be beheaded in chapter 14.

II. Where Jesus Started His Preaching Ministry (vv. 12b-16)

-- So today's passage tells us when Jesus began His preaching ministry - and it also emphasizes where Jesus started that phase of His ministry - in Galilee.

vv. 12b-16

A. The Area

-- Jesus started His preaching ministry in Galilee, the northern part of Israel, adjacent to the Sea of Galilee. Mountainous and fertile, Galilee is picturesque.

B. The Surprise

-- Although it may have been the most scenic part of Israel, Galilee was, nevertheless, a rather surprising place for Jesus to conduct His preaching ministry. The center of influence in Israel was Jerusalem, the site of the Temple and the place where all the religious leaders resided. Galilee was on the other geographic end of the nation. And it was at the opposite end of the cultural and social scale as well. Galileans were uneducated, working class people with little economic, political or religious influence. Indeed, Galileans were looked down upon as ignorant, uncultured bumpkins. Everyone was expecting the Messiah to make His appearance not in Galilee but at the Temple in Jerusalem.

C. The Prophecy

-- But the Messiah's appearance in Galilee should have come as no surprise. As Matthew points out, Jesus' ministry in Galilee actually fulfilled a prophecy made by Isaiah. Verses 14-16 are a quote from Isaiah 9:1-2.

Cf., vv. 14-16

1. "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali"

-- Isaiah refers to this area as "the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali," two of the twelve tribes of Israel. At the time of Joshua the land of Canaan was divided among the 12 tribes. The area that came to be called Galilee was assigned largely to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali.

2. "Galilee of the Gentiles"

-- Notice also that Isaiah calls it "Galilee of the Gentiles." That takes us back to 722 B.C. when the Assyrian Empire conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which included the area called Galilee. The Assyrians deported most of the Jewish population to other parts of their Empire and brought in pagan Gentiles to resettle in Galilee. From that time on a large percentage of the population of Galilee was Gentile. In Jesus' day probably half of Galilee was Gentile.

The pervasive presence of pagan beliefs and practices made Galilee a place of deep spiritual darkness. And it was there that Jesus first shone the light of the Gospel - to both Jews and Gentiles.

D. The Cities

-- Matthew also refers to two cities in Galilee in this passage.

1. Nazareth

-- The first is Nazareth. Actually, what Matthew says is that Jesus was "leaving Nazareth." When Jesus returned to Galilee following the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus obviously went first to His hometown of Nazareth. All that Matthew tells us is that Jesus then left Nazareth; Luke tells us why. In Luke 4, Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath, and the synagogue officials invited Jesus to read and remark on the Scripture, handing Him the scroll of Isaiah. Jesus proceeded to open the scroll to Isaiah 61 and to read the first two verses, which were commonly understood to be speaking about the promised Messiah.

Luke 4:17-21 <sup>And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ^{**18** "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ^{**19** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ^{**20** And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the}}}

attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

-- Jesus was, of course, laying claim to being the Messiah, which led to an intense debate and argument, and then to this scene described in verses 29-30.

Luke 4:29-30 And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. ³⁰But passing through their midst, he went away.

-- That's why Jesus was "leaving Nazareth."

2. Capernaum

-- After leaving Nazareth Jesus went and "lived in Capernaum." About 20 miles from Nazareth, Capernaum was a larger and more important city. Sitting on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum was a strategic travel and commercial location.

-- It was there at Capernaum that Jesus would call Matthew, Peter, Andrew, James and John to be His Disciples, and it was Capernaum that would become the home base for Jesus' preaching ministry in Galilee.

III. What Jesus Preached (v. 17)

-- Finally, I want us to be sure to see what it was that Jesus preached. Matthew summarizes Jesus' preaching concisely in verse 17.

v. 17

A. "Repent"

-- Like John the Baptist, Jesus preached the need for people to "repent." Literally, the word "repent" means to have a change of mind. The idea is that the change of mind will bring about an entire change of life. To repent is to realize that you're headed in the wrong direction and to turn around. It's like your GPS when it says "As soon as possible make a legal U-turn." That's what Jesus was saying - you're headed in the wrong direction - you're going away from God and you're headed for destruction. You need to make a "U-turn," and you need to make it right here, right now!

B. "The Kingdom of Heaven Is at Hand"

-- And like John the Baptist, Jesus also declared that the need to repent is urgent because "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." But now that declaration is true in a much greater sense and carries even greater urgency.

The kingdom of heaven is at hand in a whole new way. The kingdom of heaven has come near because the King of Heaven has come to earth. Jesus has entered into the kingdom of Satan to establish the Kingdom of God. In Jesus the Kingdom of Light has invaded the kingdom of darkness.

-- Satan's Kingdom of Darkness and Jesus' Kingdom of Light are completely opposites. Satan's Kingdom operates through the darkness of deception. Satan is the father of lies - he lied to Adam and told Adam that eating the forbidden tree would make Adam a God - instead it made Adam a sinner banished from God's presence. Jesus' Kingdom operates through the light of truth that shows us the way back to God.

Satan's kingdom leads to the darkness of death. When Adam fell to Satan's temptation and ate the forbidden tree, the dark shroud of death descended on Adam's soul and the virus of death invaded Adam's body - and Adam passed that spiritual and physical death on all his descendants. But Jesus' Kingdom of Light sets us free from that death and restores to us spiritual and eternal life.

CONCLUSION

When I was a kid, we would drive to my Grandmother's house on about 50 miles of 2-lane highway on West Virginia mountains. The road ran alongside of steep cliffs and made hairpin turns. It could be a rather scary drive, especially in winter. I remember that someone had put up signs at intervals along the road. The signs had just one word. The same word had been painted on some of the boulders with the hairpin turns. The word was "REPENT." Given the dangerous locations, it seemed like a good idea.

Well, Jesus comes to us and says we're in a much more dangerous condition. Apart from Him we're headed to eternal destruction.

The problem with those signs on that West Virginia road was that they told you to turn but didn't tell you where to turn to. Jesus tells us not only that we need to turn but also where we need to turn to - to Him who is the way into the Kingdom of Heaven.