

The Ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ – Matthew chapter 4, verses 12 -23:-

Note that the Gospel of Matthew (along with Mark and Luke) omits the ministry of the Lord Jesus in Judea and Samaria – see the Gospel of John chapter 1, verses 29 – 42 and chapter 2, verse 13 to chapter 4, verse 42.

Matthew probably begins his record of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ in Galilee because of his reference to Old Testament texts; in this case see Isaiah chapter 9, verses 1 – 4. He may even start with his reference to Capernaum because that is where he himself encountered the Lord Jesus (Matthew chapter 9, verse 9).

Verse 12:- “*When Jesus had heard that John had been arrested . . .*” The publicity around the arrest of John would have meant trouble for the ministry of the Lord Jesus. According to Luke, Jesus had already been threatened in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke chapter 4, verses 16 - 31). From this point on Capernaum became the home of the Lord Jesus for the rest of His ministry.

Verses 14 – 16:- These verses refer to the Old Testament prophecy in Isaiah chapter 9, verses 1 – 4. The areas mentioned form the border areas of Judea and had a mixed population of Jew and Gentile. Being open to foreign influence the spiritual state of the people was usually low. The coming light of Christ into such an area of spiritual darkness had been foretold by the prophet and the prediction was now fulfilled.

Verse 17:- “*Repent*” - The same message John had preached in Judea was now proclaimed by the Lord Jesus in Galilee.

Verses 18 – 22 – The call of four disciples:- Jesus had previously met some, if not all, of these men in Judea when John the Baptist was still active (Gospel of John chapter 1, verses 35 – 42). Now in Galilee that association was renewed and made permanent.

The Sea of Galilee is some 14 miles long and 7 miles wide. (Lake Windermere is 11 miles long and 1 mile wide). It is also subject to sudden storms.

Simon was busy fishing or maybe washing the nets (casting the net) with his brother Andrew who had introduced him to the Lord Jesus some months earlier (Gospel of John chapter 1, verses 40 – 41). The invitation “*Follow me*” called these believers to constant companionship with Jesus. His plans for them called for training that would fit them to reclaim lost men and women. The brothers James and John were called in the same way. There is no record of the reaction or feelings of Zebedee. Their father remained with the boat and carried on the fishing business. The boats appear to have remained in family ownership. See the Gospel of John chapter 21.

It is notable that these new disciples of the Lord Jesus “*immediately . . .*” left everything and followed Him.

Verse 23:- At this point the popularity of this new preacher and teacher would be an encouragement to his new followers. Here follows the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ (chapters 5 – 7 of Matthew’s Gospel). If these disciples were really listening to that teaching they may have realised what lay ahead!

A thought for prayer and reflection :-

If we are truly called to follow the Lord Jesus Christ what difference will it (or could it) make to my lifestyle?

1) *Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult
of our life's wild, restless sea,
day by day his clear voice soundeth,
saying, "Christian, follow me;"*

2) *as, of old, Saint Andrew heard it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and toil and kindred,
leaving all for his dear sake.*

3) *Jesus calls us from the worship
of the vain world's golden store;
from each idol that would keep us,
saying, "Christian, love me more."*

4) *In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in cares and pleasures,
"Christian, love me more than these."*

5) *Jesus calls us! By thy mercies,
Savior, may we hear thy call,
give our hearts to thine obedience,
serve and love thee best of all.*

Cecil Frances Alexander 1852