

**The Messiah Has Come
(A Study in Matthew - Week 8)
Matthew 4:12-17
“The Journey Home”**

Introduction

When Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard He was making and baptizing more disciples than John (though Jesus himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were), He left Judea and went again to Galilee. John 4:1-2

When studying Matthew's Gospel, the reader must take into account that the writer did not intend for his narrative to be a chronological study, but rather a record of various happenings in order to make a point. And that point was to prove that Jesus was indeed The Christ, the Anointed One of God, Who would come to save the world from sin. With this in mind, we must recognize that certain portions of Christ's ministry timeline have not been included in this particular gospel. For example, a quick reading of the passage recorded in the fourth chapter, would lead one to believe that immediately following Christ's temptation in the Judean wilderness, He departed for the province of Galilee, when in actuality approximately one years time had elapsed between these two events.

The other gospels give added insight into what Jesus was doing during this period between His wilderness experience and His return to His hometown. For a time, the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus overlapped. And as Christ's popularity grew, John's followers became fewer and fewer. This was by design, of course, for God had called John to be the “forerunner” of The Messiah. It was his duty to proclaim the coming King, and then to step aside. When John's disciples saw that he was losing his great following, they became concerned for their leader, as many loyalist would do, but John assured them that this was God's will.

After this, Jesus and His disciples went to the Judean countryside, where He spent time with them and baptized. John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there. People were coming and being baptized, since John had not yet been thrown into prison. Then a dispute arose between John's disciples and a Jew about purification. So they came to John and told him, “Rabbi, the One you testified about, and Who was with you across the Jordan, is baptizing and everyone is going to Him.” John responded, “No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah, but I've been sent ahead of Him.’ He who has the bride is the groom. But the groom's friend, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the groom's voice. So this joy of mine is complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.” John 3:22-30

So, just as a runner in a relay race is chosen to run his portion and then pass the baton to the next runner, John's time of preaching came to an end, and Christ was chosen by The Father to finish the work. As was the case with all *Old Testament* prophets, they proclaimed the coming of the chosen One, The Coming Messiah King, and then their time upon the earth ended. John was the last of those prophets, a link, if you will, between the Old Covenant and The New. His time was over, and that of The Christ was just beginning. So here in Matthew's Gospel, we are given a window in time to see the end of John's run, as it were, and the beginning of Christ's early ministry.

God had laid out a perfect timeline for His Son, and Jesus would follow every place The Spirit led in order to perfectly accomplish The Father's pre-ordained plan. So, we must understand that it was not fear of persecution, or anything that man could do to Him, that motivated the Savior's movements, but rather, it was simply God's guiding hand. With this in mind, let us look at Christ's departure from the province of Judea and His journey through Samaria back to His hometown in Nazareth of Galilee. It is a story of *God's Timetable*, *The Great Light*, and *The Gospel*. Please allow me to explain.

God's Timetable (vs. 12-13)

When He heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew into Galilee. He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulon and Naphtali. Matthew 4:12-13

It was Herod Antipas (son of Herod The Great) who had arrested John the Baptist. Herod had stolen his brother's wife, and John preached against it. The prophet had no problem speaking truth to power, and it cost him his freedom. But better to be right with God than to be popular with men. The Pharisees were no doubt overjoyed at John's arrest, for they also had become his enemies, but they were afraid to raise a hand against him for fear of the people, for John's following had been substantial before they begin to leave him and go over to Jesus.

At first glance, it would appear that Jesus left Judea because He was afraid of incurring Herod's wrath. Nothing could be further from the truth, and John's gospel gives us additional insight into the circumstances that prompted Christ departure. For you see, it wasn't only Herod that had cracked down on the prophets, but Jesus had also drawn the attention of the Pharisees, when it became known that Jesus' disciples were baptizing more converts than even John (**John 4:1-2**). So Jesus left Judea and headed back to the province of Galilee. He feared neither the Pharisees, nor Herod, (Herod also had jurisdiction over Galilee), but it was a matter of timing.

Christ had the power to wipe both Herod, and the Pharisees for that matter, from the face of the earth with just a word. So of course He had no fear of them, but His time had not yet come. So rather than speed into a confrontation with either party, He returned to Galilee, for there was work to be done before His departure from this world. First of all, disciples needed to be called and taught in order for the Church to be firmly established. And then, there was a matter of the preaching that needed to take place in order for people to grasp the realities of the kingdom of heaven.

We know that Jesus' return to Galilee took Him through the region of Samaria, where he encountered the adulterous woman at the well and shared with her the gospel message of God's grace and forgiveness to all who will believe and repent. Jesus quietly went about his mission of obedience, taking every single day and every step in obedience to The Father's plan. Knowing full well, that the end result would lead Him up the road to Mount Calvary and the cross. But this would only occur at the fullness of time preordained by The Father Himself.

Matthew tells us that Jesus first stop when He returned to Galilee was to His own hometown of Nazareth, but he doesn't give us any further information on the subject. But Luke's gospel fills in the gaps for us. Jesus went into the local synagogue in Nazareth to teach and was summarily rejected by the people there.

He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. As usual, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him, and unrolling the scroll, He found the place where it was written: The Spirit of The LORD is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of The LORD'S favor. He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on Him. He began by saying to them, "Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled." They were all speaking well of Him and were amazed by His gracious words that came from his mouth; yet they said, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" Luke 4:16-22

The crowd in Nazareth at first seemed to receive Him, but as He spoke more and more of their sinful hearts and their need of repentance, the angrier they became, until once more, He found Himself rejected by His very own. The people of Nazareth tried to throw Him off a cliff for His preaching, but yet again, His time had not come. So God intervened and rescued Him from their clutches. Jesus passed through the crowd and went on His way (**Luke 4:28-30**). From there, He moved down to Capernaum, once more following God's Schedule to the letter and fulfilling yet another Messianic prophecy!

The Great Light (vs. 14-16)

This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, along the road by the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who live in darkness have seen a great light, and for those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. Matthew 4:14-16

It is imperative for us to remember that Matthew is writing his gospel for the sole purpose of convincing his mainly Jewish audience that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah, the King of the Jews. So here, he masterfully connects Isaiah's prophecy to the very movements of Jesus in the beginning phase of His ministry. All throughout *The New Testament*, Christ is referred to as "The Light". For example, in the gospel of John, it says of Him:

All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. John 1:3-9

And Jesus said of Himself in one of His seven "I Am" statements in John's Gospel:

...*"I Am the light of the world. Anyone who follows Me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life."* John 8:12b

And just as Isaiah had prophesied, Jesus, The Light of the World, came to bring that light to the "Galilee of the Gentiles". The area was looked down upon by the more sophisticated Jewish population of Judea, for Galileans had their own ways of doing things. Years of exposure to pagan Gentiles of the region had diluted the core religious beliefs of the people living there; to the point where many sinful practices were not only tolerated but viewed as *normal*. The same could be said for our own country today, for many things that were considered sinful not very long ago are now accepted and even celebrated in the name of so-called tolerance.

The people who lived on the coast of The Sea of Galilee were in desperate need of light. Light that would come and expose their sin, and light that would lead them to the paths of righteousness. Jesus was the light sent by God Himself to illuminate the way for us all to follow. Naphtali and Zebulun were the sixth and tenth sons of Jacob respectively and were also some of the first tribes to forsake God and turn to pagan idols. Christ came to preach repentance to the people of these cities in order to bring the light to them.

Capernaum was a large and prosperous coastal city that was a seaport bringing many trade goods to the area. Therefore, it was considered as a crucial part of the local economy. The word Capernaum literally means "the city of comfort", and it was there that Christ established His base of operations, as it were. But even with such light in its midst, the people there chose the darkness over His light. Leading Him to later pronounce this curse upon them:

***"And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."* Matthew 11:23-24**

This should serve as a warning to us all: When we are shown the light of Christ, it would be wise to respond, repent, and resolve ourselves to follow. For He is God's anointed Messiah, the King of kings and LORD of lords. He is the Light of the World. The great light even for pagan Gentiles such as those who lived in Capernaum. God sent *The Light* of the world... for God so *loved* the world.

The Gospel (vs. 17)

From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near.” **Matthew 4:17**

We hear a lot these days about the “gospel”. The English word “gospel” actually comes from the old anglican word “Godspell”, which speaks of God’s plan to redeem mankind. The word in the Greek that is often translated “gospel” is “*euangelion*” (pronounced yoo-ang-ghel’-ee-on), which literally means *good tidings* or *good news*.

And it is necessary that the gospel be preached to all nations. **Mark 13:10**

While it is absolutely true that the gospel carries the good news of God’s mercy, grace, and salvation, we must always make certain that the gospel we have come to believe in and share is the *gospel of Jesus Christ*. In other words, we must share the same message that *He* shared. Other forms of good news being labeled as “gospel” are not truth, if they do not align with *His* preaching. And what exactly did Jesus preach? Repentance from sin. It was the exact same message that John the Baptist preached. The reason for this is simple: **You cannot stay where you are and go with God!** Repentance, the turning away from sin to follow Christ, is the only way to possess saving faith.

Way too many false prophets these days have watered down the gospel of Christ by saying it is merely some unattached belief in Jesus that saves. Do not get me wrong. We are saved, by grace through faith and that not of ourselves, it is God’s gift and not from works, so that no one can boast (**Ephesians 2:9**). But genuine saving faith will always be accompanied by repentance.

Allow me to explain it this way. As we have previously seen, Christ is indeed the “Light of the World”. The Holy Spirit comes into the darkness of our sin and not only reveals Christ to us, but our sin as well. We see Christ and our sins simultaneously. To be in His presence is to see ourselves as unholy and unworthy. Anyone who says they have met Christ and are not convicted by their sin is merely deceiving themselves. The light of Christ exposes our wickedness. That is what light does when it is shown in a dark and filthy place. It exposes the filth!

I remember back years ago in my “music playing days” some of the band stayed in the rental house of our manager. When we left that town and moved to Nashville, we forgot to pay the last electric bill, and the lights were subsequently turned off. One day I received a phone call that I needed to go back up there and clean out the freezer. So when I arrived they had turned the power back on. And I walked into the kitchen and opened the freezer door. The smell of rotting meat nearly knocked me down. I had no idea what I was gettin myself into, but when I opened the door and the freezer light came on, there was no denying the rottenness that lay within. It was horrible, and I have never forgotten all the time it took me to dispose of all that stuff and how hard it was to remove the smell from the freezer.

I say that to say this: When the true light of Christ comes into our lives, we cannot deny the rottenness in us that His light exposes. And when we see it, we see our need for cleansing. But there isn’t enough bleach in the world to make us clean my friends. Only the blood of Jesus can wash us clean. And that is *when we fall on our knees, and confess our sin, and ask for His forgiveness*. So where does faith come into all of this? First, we believe that Jesus is exactly who The Scriptures tell us that He is. He is God incarnate, the God/Man Who came to die as payment for our sins. And second, we must have faith that Jesus is LORD and will do what He has promised, and that is to forgive and cleanse us of our sin, when we place our faith in Him. Therein lies true salvation. Listen to what John the disciple says about this:

If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say, “We have no sin,” we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **1 John 1:7-9**

That is the gospel of Jesus Christ. When the light comes to us, and we see Him, we see ourselves. Then we believe in Him, and repent (turn away from our sins), and walk with Him in the light of His Word. We turn from the direction we are going, and we follow Christ. And that is genuine salvation. That is the true good news of the gospel, for **you cannot stay where you are... and go with God.**

Truth!!!