

Jesus' Ministry

Today's sermon is entitled, "Jesus' Ministry," and is taken from Matthew 4:12-17. Jesus' time has now come – the time when he was to go forth to his great purpose.

There is much in this passage for every believer, layman, and minister alike. Every believer is called of God, actually sent into the world for a specific purpose. The sad fact is that too many believers are not aware of their purpose. They do not know why God sent them into the world. They have not sought God to discover their purpose for their lives; therefore, they are just walking through life doing the same tasks and activities which occupied their time before they were saved. But the believer who knows God's purpose for his life, the day comes when he is to go forth to his purpose. He is to go forth as Christ when forth, to carry on the great task which God has given him to do. To help us find out what our mission and message is, I've divided this sermon into **five** sections. **First**, we'll look at the sign that was given to begin Jesus' ministry – John the Baptist's imprisonment. **Second**, we'll look at Galilee, Jesus' chosen headquarters. **Third**, we'll look at Jesus' deliberate decision to fulfill Scripture.

Fourth, we'll look at Jesus's mission. And **fifth**, we'll look at Jesus' message.

Okay, let's begin the **First** section with John the Baptist's imprisonment, which was the sign given to begin Jesus' ministry. God showed Christ when to begin his ministry. The imprisonment of John the Baptist was Christ's sign to launch out in full force. He had been ministering in Judea (Jn 4:1), but not as publicly or as extensively as he was now to do. He could now go forth and tackle his task to the fullest. Why now? Why not earlier?

Jesus could not give the appearance of competing with John. If Jesus began his ministry in full force before John's ministry had been completed, the loyalty of the people would have been divided. John was sent to prepare the way, and the way was not fully prepared until John was removed from the scene. We, as believers who live and walk in Christ, will be directed by God. We will know when to go forth to our tasks, when to carry out God's purpose for our lives – just as Christ knew. God will guide and direct us, as we're told in Isaiah 48:14,

“I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go.”

The eclipse of John by Jesus holds a significant lesson for believers of every generation. The believer is to be serving the Lord from day one of his conversion, and when the day comes for him to launch out in full force to carry out God's purpose for his life, he must go forth. Within every generation, God raised up witnesses to follow other witnesses in order to carry on the work of the ministry. Believers are not rivals. They are joint servants of the Lord who work together in their respective ministries. They are not to compete against each other. And when the time comes, when a servant's ministry is completed, he is to willingly step aside. In fact, a believer should prepare to have his ministry eclipsed, to move aside while God raises up others to carry on after he is gone. God cannot wait until a generation is gone to raise up others. There would not be time for the new generation to take over and affect a smooth transition. God has to raise up new servants and thrust them into the forefront as the older generation

fades into the background. Such eclipsing should be accepted willingly and graciously, which is what we are told in Ephesians 4:11-12, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."

The **second** section of this sermon is Jesus' chosen headquarters, Galilee. Why Galilee? Jesus' hometown was Nazareth, yet he left Nazareth. Why did he not make his hometown his headquarters? The reason is clear. The city of Nazareth rejected Jesus. We are told in Luke 4:24, "No *prophet* is accepted in his hometown." They had thrown him out and had attempted to kill him we're told in Luke 4:29. Therefore, Jesus set up headquarters in Galilee. It was deliberately chosen by Christ as "his own town."

God had prepared Galilee down through history for the coming of his Son's ministry. Several facts show this. **First**, throughout history, Galilee have been invaded and

repopulated again and again with different people and cultures from all over the world. Over the years, such an influx of differing people had created an atmosphere susceptible to new personalities and ideas. **Second**, Galilee was strategically located. The world's leading roads passed right through its borders. Merchants from all over the world passed through, boarding in its cities. **Third**, Galilee was heavily populated. It was also surrounded by the Samaritans, Phoenicians, and Syrians making it an open door for world evangelization. It was one of the most fertile lands in that part of the world. This fact, plus the traveling trade, led numbers to settle within its borders. There were within the district over 200 cities with a population of 15,000 or more. So, there were multitudes for Jesus to reach. **Fourth**, Galilee was open to new and fresh ideas. Its people, having come from all over the world, were liberal minded, always looking for new and fresh ideas to stimulate and challenge their thinking. And, **fifth**, since there was a large Gentile population present, another possible reason for Jesus selecting Galilee as his headquarters is

that it demonstrates that he is the Savior of all nations, not just of the Jews.

It was for these reasons that Christ chose Galilee to begin his ministry. The area was an open door for people to spread the news that the Messiah had come and the kingdom of heaven was being ushered in. So, Jesus' place of ministry was deliberately chosen and was considered for its strategic location, as pointed out in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The **third** deliberate decision Christ made, as I mentioned in my introduction, was his decision to fulfill scripture. We turn to Isaiah 9:1-2 for confirmation of this fulfillment: "Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future, he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan."

The **fourth** deliberate decision was Jesus' mission. Christ's mission was people; he focused on people. Note what is said about the mission of Christ in Matthew 20:28, "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." In addition, Christ took people in darkness and showed them light as we see in John 8:12, "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'." And Christ took people in death and gave them light, as we're told in John 5:24, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

The mission of every believer is **also** people – to take people and to do what Christ did. Since Christ came, two wonderful things are now present to help believers with this mission. First, light is now present. Man, no longer has to seek light because God has sent the light into the world. Second, choice is now present. Man can now choose light; he does not have to remain in darkness.

But let's take a look at what is said about the people of the world. People are in darkness as it says in John 1:5, "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." In addition, the people of the world sit in darkness. They accept and are comfortable in darkness, pleased with their lives. Scripture says men love darkness rather than light, as we're told in John 3:19-21, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

People sit in the region and shadow of death. But right now, while living on the earth, death is only a shadow. So, there is hope for man; man has the opportunity to be saved from death, from doom, and from condemnation. As we are told in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." This is the

verse we are all familiar with, but the next two verses, 17-18, warn us of the shadow of death: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

People now see a **great** light, the greatest of lights: Christ himself, which we read in John 8:12, "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'." So, people now have a light that is "sprung up." They have a light that grows and continues. There is a growing opportunity to walk out of the darkness into the light and to live forever, conquering death, as we're told in John 5:25, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

The **fifth** and final division of this sermon is Jesus' message. The words "from that time" in verse 17 are

extremely significant. They indicate *urgency, persistence, and perseverance*: three excellent words describing the obsession of Christ with his mission and message. It had two major points: **first**, Christ preached repentance and **second**, he preached the kingdom of heaven is near.

First, we'll look at repentance. Jesus began his public ministry with the same message as John the Baptist. The people repent because God's reign was drawing near in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Repentance means to change; to turn; to change one's mind; to turn one's life. It is a turning away from sin and turning toward God. It is a change of mind, a forsaking of sin. It is putting sin out of one's thoughts and behavior. It is resolving never to think or do a thing again, as we're told in Luke 13:3, "I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

The change is turning away from lying, stealing, cheating, immorality, cursing, drunkenness, and the other so-called sins of the flesh or our sinful nature. But the change is also turning away from the silent sins of the spirit such as self-centeredness, selfishness, envy, bitterness, pride,

covetousness, anger, evil thoughts, hopelessness, laziness, jealousy, and lust.

Repentance involves two turns. There is a negative turn away from sin and a positive turn toward God. It is a turning to God from sin, whether sins of thought or action.

Repentance is more than sorrow. Sorrow may or may not be involved in repentance. A person may repent simply because he wills or acts to change; or a person may repent because he senses an agonizing sorrow within. But the sense or feeling of sorrow is not repentance. Repentance is **both** the change of mind and the actual turning of one's life away from sin and toward God, which is what we're told in Acts 8:22, "Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart."

The **second** thing Christ preached was that the kingdom of heaven is near; at hand, as he did in Mark 1:14-15, "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news'!"

There are four lessons we can learn here. **First**, believers should become obsessed with the mission of the Lord! They should be gripped and enslaved by the obsession of Christ! Here is why. Man, no longer has to seek light. The light of the world has come, but so many are still in the darkness. They have not heard. Believers in their lethargy and lack of urgency, have hoarded the message, failing to go forth as God's messenger of light. That message and mission we are to carry is in Luke 19:10, "For the son of man came to seek and save what was lost."

The **second** lesson we can learn here is that the ministry of believers is the same as Christ's: to preach. All other work and ministries are important, but the primary ministry of all believers is to preach, to proclaim the gospel to a world crying for help.

The **third** lesson we can learn here is that the message of believers is the same as Christ's: (1) repent; (2) the kingdom of heaven is at hand. All other subjects are important, but the primary message must be these two points.

The **fourth** lesson we can learn here is that believers are given the highest honor in the world; they are sent into the world on the same mission as God's very own son. Imagine having the same mission and message as God's son!

Please bow your heads as I pray.

Heavenly Father,

According to Matthew, when Jesus settles in Galilee, he becomes a "light" for the people of those regions through his teaching and healing. Help us to be imitators of your Son's behavior and become a messenger of your light. Whatever darkness we are facing today, help us to receive the light of your kingdom, help us to submit to Christ's rules, and therefore have his light shine on you. Help us to repent of some known sin and put your kingdom priorities before ours and before anyone else's. Help us to entrust our lives to you and to receive the blessings of yours as your wisdom determines. Father, give us the light of life, even in the shadow of death. We ask this in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**