

The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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CHAPTER SEVEN

MATTHEW 4:12-25

IT is quite plain that between verses 11 and 12 there is a gap in the chronology.

It is interesting and remarkable, that the three evangelists whom we describe as synoptists, omit a section of the public ministry of Jesus, covering twelve months. There can be no doubt that such a period of time elapsed between verses 11 and 12, in this fourth chapter of Matthew. We read, **“Then the devil leaveth Him; and behold, angels came and ministered unto Him;”** and immediately following, **“Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison”** that is, when John was arrested and imprisoned **“He departed into Galilee.”**

Although we are studying the Gospel of Matthew, it will not be out of place, and certainly not lacking in interest, if we attempt to fill up the gap, in order that we may know what happened in the ministry of Jesus.

Coming back from the wilderness, and from His temptation, Jesus seems to have lingered in the neighborhood of John’s ministry for at least three days.

On the first day, He stood amongst the crowd unrecognized by them, but discovered by John. On that first day John said, **“There standeth one among you, whom ye know not.”**

On the second day, for some purpose, Jesus moved through the crowd towards John himself, and John saw Him coming to him, and then made his great pronouncement, **“Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!”**

On the third day, Jesus was again seen by John, but walking away; and as He went. John cried out, **“Behold the Lamb of God!”** and immediately two at least of John’s disciples left him, and followed Jesus.

- On the first day, John spoke of *the perfect Person* **“There standeth one among you, whom ye know not, even He that cometh after me, the latchet of Whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose.”**

- On the second day he spoke of *the perfect Propitiation* **“The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!”**

- On the last day he spoke of *the perfect Pattern* **“The Lamb of God.”**

Immediately following this, Jesus turned to John's disciples who came after Him, and said, "**What seek ye?**" One of them replied by asking, "**Rabbi . . . where dwellest Thou?**" And He said, "**Come and see.**" And they followed Him.

One of them was Andrew. The other is not named. Andrew immediately found Simon his brother, and brought him to Jesus. And Jesus "**findeth Philip.**" Whether He knew him before or not, we cannot tell, but He sought him and found him. And "**Philip findeth Nathanael.**" That group constituted the first nucleus of disciples.

But we are not yet at the point in the history which Matthew records. The disciples and Jesus went to Cana of Galilee. Jesus went as a guest. It was a purely social function. He tarried for two or three days down in Capernaum, and then went on to Jerusalem; presented Himself in the Temple; and cleansed it. This was His official presentation to the rulers of His people.

Then we have an account of His conversation with Nicodemus, after which He left the metropolis and came into Judaea. John was still pursuing his ministry, and baptizing in Jordan near to Salim, because there was much water there that "**the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples).**"

Thus He did not commence to exercise His definitely official ministry as King until John's ministry ended, through his arrest. These things that John records for us are of value, but they have a peculiar relation to the message of John.

In this Gospel of Matthew all these matters are omitted. Matthew, writing the Gospel of the Kingdom, after having presented the person of the King, takes up the story at the point where, the message of the herald having been silenced by his arrest and imprisonment, Jesus began His official work as King, proclaiming His Kingdom prior to enunciating its laws and exhibiting its benefits.

In this paragraph we have the account of the initial work in the proclamation of the Kingdom; the propaganda of the King commences.

There are three movements to notice in this brief passage.

First, Jesus came down into Capernaum, and took up His residence there, and began to utter the fundamental note of His Kingly ministry "**Repent: for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.**"

Then Jesus gathered a nucleus of men, for purposes of co-operation with Him. The rest of the paragraph is occupied with a very brief and yet beautiful statement of the remarkable success attending the initial ministry of the King.

His residence in Capernaum is in itself remarkable, demanding attention. Why did Jesus come to Capernaum of all other places? Matthew, who is perpetually tracing the connection between the ministry of Jesus and the great prophecies of the past, distinctly says that

“He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

**The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
by the sea, beyond Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles;
The people which sat in darkness
Saw great light,
And to them which sat in the region
and shadow of death,
light is spring up.”**

Now let us go back to the prophecy of Isaiah. In ch. 9:1 we read:

“Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.”

In the consideration of the beginning of our Gospel we saw how Matthew quoted from Isaiah with regard to the virgin birth of our Lord; **“Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.”** The prophecy begins with the promise of the virgin conception and ends here with the Child born, and the government placed upon His shoulders; and constitutes a complete unveiling of the Divine purpose.

The prophet Isaiah, standing on that mountain peak, and looking out over the mist and the darkness of his own time, saw the coming of Immanuel, God with us. He saw Immanuel go down to Zebulun and Naphtali, the lands that suffered most from the Assyrians, to the place and peoples most degraded as the result of their presence.

This is not merely a geographical prophecy it is that in a secondary sense but it is a prophecy based upon a principle. When God visits His people for redemption, He comes where the darkness is greatest; where the peoples sit in the shadow of death.

Geographically, and according to principle, He did that very thing. Capernaum was in the despised region of the country of the chosen people known as **“Galilee of the Gentiles.”**

And you must be a Hebrew to understand that, or at least must feel with the heart of a Hebrew.

It was “a portion of the country which had been overrun more than any other by the foreign invader, and therefore known as **‘the region and shadow of death.’** “

That was Capernaum; and Jesus began His public ministry there. He went down and dwelt in Capernaum. There was the first Christian settlement.

Jesus did not go down to teach them how to obtain better social conditions, but to bring them to God. The difference is fundamental. His first word was “**Repent.**” He did not commence where people were least likely to need it. Capernaum was His basis; His center; the point from which He moved out to begin His preaching. The people which sat in darkness saw light; the people which sat in the region of the shadow of death saw the great light; He began His initial, Kingly ministry, in Capernaum, on the fringe of things.

If we would be partakers with Christ in work, we must go to Capernaum; to the fringe of things; to the despised countries, to the helpless districts; to the regions wrapped in the pall of a great death, and a great darkness. It was not accidentally that Christ went and dwelt in Capernaum.

But what did His coming to Capernaum mean?

When He came it was a great day for Capernaum, if Capernaum had only understood it “ **The people which sat in darkness saw great light. And to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light is spring up.**”

Think of it, that for a little at least, there dwelt in Capernaum the very Light of Life, the very Light of Love, the very Light of Truth. They became familiar with His form and the tones of His voice; for everywhere they crowded to Him from all the district, bringing unfit people in crowds. He was the prophet Who had lived in Nazareth through long years; now He made Capernaum His base of operations, that neglected city living under the shadow of death. When He came, men saw Life at its highest, and its best, according to a Divine Ideal; the Light of Love flashed over their sorrows and their sins; the Light of Truth illuminated the dark corners, and revealed evil things. There, in the midst of the darkness and in the midst of the need, He struck the key-note of His ministry.

That key-note was the proclamation of a great fact, and the uttering of a great call! The fact “**the Kingdom of heaven is at hand;**” the call “**Repent ye.**” Jesus came into Capernaum, and men woke from their stupor, slumber, and degradation, and asked the meaning of the light.

He said, “**the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.**” And while they heard Him say “**the Kingdom of heaven is at hand,**” His own heavenly, Kingly life revealed it. Then they heard Him say, “**repent,**” change your minds. They heard Him say, You are wrong in your surroundings because you are wrong in your heart. The darkness is on you because the darkness is in you. The Kingdom of heaven is come to you, and the Light is on you. Admit it by repentance. There was much more to say, much unveiling, much exposition, much illumination, but that was the key-note of all the message. Then there came the necessity for something more; and we find Him calling to Himself these four men.

Let us notice:

- First, the call of the four men;
- Secondly, the purpose for which He called them;
- Finally, their answer to Him.

Simon and Andrew were already personal disciples, as we see by reference to John's Gospel.

Andrew was one of John's disciples. On that third day, when Jesus had moved away and left John in order to proceed to His own work, Andrew had followed Him, and having come to the Messiah, had called Simon. In this picture in Matthew they are all fishing.

This call was not to discipleship; it was the call to fellowship in service.

He saw them there at their work, and looking at them while they handled the net, He said, "**Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.**" It was the call to new work; to the abandonment of everything, in order to devote themselves to Him and His work.

This is not a call that comes to every man.

Every man was not called, even in the days of our Lord's earthly ministry. All men are not called now. These men were thus specially called. For a year they had been personal disciples; now He called them to quit their fishing, to lay aside their nets, to go with Him for a new vocation and work. He illustrated their new work by using the figure of their old occupation "**I will make you fishers of men.**"

James and John were in their father's boat mending nets, and doing the work of their daily calling. It may be they had been called into personal fellowship before, but this was the call to service and work.

The King was about to enunciate His great propaganda of the Kingdom. In order to do so it was necessary that He should have a few men gathered around Him, who were loyal to His kingship.

He desired to utter the laws of His Kingdom, but He could only do so to men who were in His Kingdom.

When our Lord calls men away from their daily vocation into a new vocation, He calls them with infinite simplicity, and great sublimity, by suggesting to them that all that they have been using for themselves they can now use for Him - "**I will make you fishers of men.**"

The principle here is not that Jesus is going to make us all fishers of men. He is going to make us all workers, and turn any capacity we have into account. Jesus found me at my desk with boys about me, teaching them, and He passed me one day and said, Come with Me, and I will make you a teacher of men. He took hold of that which I could do, and said, Do it for Me.

If He had said "**fishers,**" He never would have won me.

- He took fishermen, and He said, Fish.
- He will take soldiers if they will hear, and He will say to them, Fight for Me.
- He will take the teacher and say to Him, Teach for Me.

What He wants, is men who will give Him the capacity they have, and let Him lift it into a higher realm, and He will use it, never mind what it is. He said to these men, Come with Me and I will make you fishers of men; I will take the training you have, and use it on higher levels.

And how beautiful is the answer! It is the same in each case.

“**Straightway**” for Andrew and Simon; and “**Straightway**” for James and John.

Immediately they dropped their nets and went out after Him. They left their nets and their father, and went out after Him to follow Him. At His command for service, they abandoned their daily calling. They did not do this until He ordered them to.

The vast multitude of Christian people are not called to leave their fishing-nets. They are called to abide in their calling with God; which is quite as honourable as leaving it. The honourable thing is to obey Christ, and the despicable thing is to disobey.

What He wants is men who can keep hold of the things of the daily calling, until He calls. Has He called you? If He has called you to the ministry, drop the things in your hands straightway; the Kingdom waits for violent hands. If He has not called you, keep hold of the fishing-nets, and you will find when the glory breaks upon your vision by and by, that the fishing-nets, and the fishing, were parts of God’s work for winning the world.

He called them, and they went straightway.

That last paragraph which tells of the initial success of this ministry of the King is very beautiful. He went everywhere, teaching, preaching, and healing.

“And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.”

Was there ever such a crowd as that?

The picture is hardly fascinating at first. Look at the crowd. Look at the fit, who are bringing all the unfit people of the district to Him.

Yet it is the most beautiful picture. They brought the sick, the diseased, and the devil-possessed to Him, and He healed them. He is doing it to-day wherever He comes and exercises His ministry, though His word be stern as the flash of Heaven’s own word “**Repent.**”

They came after Him with diseased people, and broken people those physically and spiritually afflicted. They are still gathering to-day, notwithstanding the fact that people criticize certain men and methods. Some come out of idle curiosity, but deep down underneath is the hunger to find someone Who will heal. This is a great picture!

Oh, it is a fearfully sad picture!

One is always thankful as one reads it, though it seems a strange thing to say, to remember that the Master was not deceived by the multitudes. He knew perfectly well those thronging multitudes. He took accurate measure of the depth of their conviction, and its shallowness. He knew that within a short year or two, some of these very people would hound Him to His death. He knew they would kill Him, and He stayed with them, and loved them, and died for them.

Oh! matchless King! Let us crown Him anew. Let us put upon His brow some other wreath, some other chaplet!

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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