

## [Mt 4:12-23](#)

Gospel

### Jerome Biblical Commentary

(d) THE FIRST PROCLAMATION IN GALILEE (4:12-17). The complete account of the imprisonment of John the Baptist is given in 14:1-12. The three Syn (and Jn in its own way) agree that Jesus did not begin his own proclamation until John had been imprisoned by Herod Antipas (→ History of Israel, 75:144). The associations of Jesus and John are too obscurely known for us to determine what is implied in this situation. The Syn, as we have seen, do not relate any confession of John the Baptist in any way similar to the version we find in the Fourth Gospel. We may conjecture that the preaching of John had aroused a climate of interest into which Jesus could move with his own proclamation. All three Syn also agree that Jesus returned to Galilee, his own country, to proclaim the reign. **13. in Capernaum by the sea:** Jesus moved from his own village of Nazareth to the larger city of Capernaum (identified with the ruins Tell Hum near the northern end of the western shore of the Sea of Galilee). In NT times the western shore of the lake was occupied by many busy and prosperous small cities and towns; and we must assume that Jesus wished to reach a wider audience. *in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali:* Matthew notes that Capernaum lay in the old tribal territory of Zebulun and Naphtali; this enables him to adduce Is 8:23-9:1 (LXX 9:1-2). In the Isaian passage deliverance of 9:2-6 is first announced to the territory of Galilee, which was detached from the kingdom of Israel by Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria in 734 BC and erected into an Assyrian province. The first part of Israel to experience the destroying wrath of Yahweh shall be the first to hear of his salvation. The quotation follows neither the LXX nor the MT. **17. kingdom of heaven:** Mt compresses Mk's summary of the proclamation of Jesus, using the phrase Mk uses to summarize the preaching of John (3:2) without Mk's allusion to the "time" (kairos) and Mk's call to faith. The typical Matthaean phrase, "kingdom of heaven," appears here instead of Mk's "kingdom of God"; the circumlocution of "heavens" for "God" was a common Jewish manner of speech. Jews of this period avoided the use of the divine name or what were regarded as peculiarly divine titles. The word usually translated "kingdom" is more accurately rendered "reign"; this is the word employed in this commentary, except in a few passages. The word does not designate an area in which power is exercised, but the exercise of the power (→ Aspects NT Thought, 78:102-105). What "approaches" (or "is arriving") is the manifestation of the supreme power of God, the assertion of his sovereignty. The first response to this is repentance; for sin is a refusal to accept the reign of God.

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Syn Synoptic Gospels or Synoptic writers

NT New Testament

LXX Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT)

MT Masoretic Text (of the Hebrew Bible)

**28** (e) THE CALL OF THE FIRST DISCIPLES (4:18-22). Matthew here depends on Mk, which he has slightly rewritten. Luke, perhaps employing a peculiar source, has rewritten the story more extensively and added the miraculous catch of fish. Jn 1:35-42 has a quite different account: Andrew and another disciple (not named, but presumably John himself) were disciples of John the Baptist, who introduced them to Jesus; and Andrew introduced his brother Simon. The point of the story in Mt and Mk is that the four followed Jesus immediately even though they did not know him; they “dropped” their fishing nets, left their families, and became disciples. There is no implication that they returned to their homes and their livelihood. Three of this first four—Peter, James, and John—formed an inner three who witnessed incidents not seen by the other disciples (17:1; 26:37, Mk 5:37). A similar urgency is expressed in the call of Levi (9:9). The promise to make them “fishers of men” is an intimation of the apostolic office.

**29** (f) A JOURNEY IN GALILEE (4:23-25). This brief passage is compiled by Matthew as an introduction to the first of his major discourses, the Sermon on the Mount. The summary is described in commonplaces: teaching in the synagogues (mentioned several times), proclaiming the good news of the reign, healing diseases, exorcising demons. As a result of these activities Jesus became known “in all Syria” (4:24). The Roman province of Syria was bounded by the Taurus mountains, the Syrian desert, the Nabataean kingdom, and the Mediterranean. Matthew means those parts of the province mentioned in 4:25; Galilee, the Decapolis (N and E of Galilee), Judea and Perea (E of the Jordan). These are regions which Jesus traversed. The region of Tyre and Sidon (Mk 3:8; Lk 6:17) is not mentioned, very probably because Matthew thought that this territory was already included in his enumeration; see 15:21.

### Haydock’s Catholic Commentary

**Ver. 10.** Jesus Christ does not here cite the words, but the substance of the text. (Deuteronomy v. 7. and 9; vi. 13; x. 20.) --- It is remarkable that our Lord bore with the pride and insolence of the devil, till he assumed to himself the honour due to God alone. (St. Chrysostom)

**Ver. 11.** Then the devil having exhausted all his artifices, left him for a time, as St. Luke remarks; whence we are to learn, that after we have resisted with success, we are not to think ourselves secure, but avail ourselves of the truce to return thanks to God for the victory, and to prepare for fresh combats, especially by fortifying ourselves with the bread of angels in the holy communion. The temptations of Jesus Christ are to us a subject both of consolation and instruction. By example he has taught us how to fight and to conquer. The struggle may be painful; but angels, as well as God, witness our struggle, ready to crown our victory. (Haydock)

**Ver. 12.** Jesus then left the wilderness, and passed a few day on the banks of the Jordan, affording his holy precursor an opportunity of bearing repeated testimony of him and of his divine mission, as we read in the first chap. of St. John, and then retired into

Upper Galilee to avoid the fury of the Jews. There were two Galilees, that of the Jews and that of the Gentiles; this latter was given by the king of Tyre to king Solomon. (St. Jerome) This conduct of Jesus Christ, shews that on some occasions it is not only lawful, but advisable, to flee from persecution. (St. Chrysostom) --- Jesus Christ enters more publicly on his mission, and about to occupy the place of his precursor, the baptist, he chooses Galilee for the first theatre of his ministry, the place assigned by the ancient prophets. The Pharisees had prevailed upon Herod to arrest the baptist, nor could their hatred be less to Jesus Christ, who drew a still greater concourse of disciples after him.

**Ver. 13.** Nazareth was situated in Lower Galilee; and Capharnaum, a maritime town, in Higher Galilee. According to the historian, Josephus, it did not belong to Herod, the tetrarch, who sent the baptist to confinement, but to Philip, the tetrarch, his brother. (Calmet) --- He leaves Nazareth for good and all, and retires to Capharnaum, a very flourishing and much frequented emporium, both for the Jews and Gentiles. Here he makes his chief residence, a place well calculated for his preaching, being on the limits of both Galilees, although he made frequent excursions through Galilee to disseminate his doctrines. (Syn. crit.)

**Ver. 15.** St. Matthew has omitted in this place part of the prophecy, (Isaias ix.) because it was not to his purpose. He has likewise given us the mystical, though still true, interpretation of the prophecy, which was written in the first instance to foretell the deliverance of Jerusalem from Senacherib, in the time of Ezechias. (1 Kings, xix.) (Jansenius)

**Ver. 16.** *And a light is risen, &c.* This light, foretold by the prophet Isaias, (chap. ix, ver. 1,) was our Saviour Christ, the light of the world, who now enlightened them by his instructions, and by his grace. (Witham) --- Thus when the morning star has gone by and disappeared, the sun rises and diffuses its light to mortals, who rejoice that the darkness of night is removed from the earth. (Jansenius)

**Ver. 17.** Jesus began not to preach till St. John had announced his coming to the world, that the dignity of his sacred person might thus be manifested, and the incredulous Jews be without excuse. If after the preaching of St. John, and his express testimony of the divinity of our Redeemer, they could still say: thou givest testimony of thyself; thy testimony is not true: what would they not have said, if, without any precursor, he had, all on a sudden, appeared amongst them. He did not begin to preach till St. John was cast into prison, that the people might not be divided. On this account also St. John wrought no miracle, that the people might be struck with the miracles of our Saviour, and yield their assent to him. (St. Chrysostom, hom. 14.) --- It may here be remarked, how different were the motives of the prophets from those which the baptist and Christ made use of to exhort to repentance. The former menaced evil, and held out a promise of good, but the good or evil was temporal. St. John begins his exhortations with the threat of eternal punishments---but Christ sweetens the hardships of penance by reminding us of the reward. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Jansenius)

**Ver. 18.** Jesus wished not only to prove that the establishment of his religion was heavenly, but also to humble the pride of man; and therefore he did not choose orators and philosophers, but fishermen, says St. Jerome. Cyprian, the eloquent orator, was called to the priesthood; but before him was Peter, the fisherman. (St. Chrysostom) --- *Jesus saw two brothers, &c.* If we compare what is related by the evangelists, as to the time that St. Peter and St. Andrew became Christ's disciples, we shall find Andrew, who had been a disciple of St. John Baptist, to have *brought to Christ his brother Simon.* (John i, ver. 40.) But at that time they staid not with him, so as to become his disciples, and to remain with him as they afterwards did, by quitting their boat, their nets, their fishing, and all they had in the world, which is here related; and by St. Mark, (chap. i,) and by St. Luke, chap. v. (Witham)

**Ver. 19.** Jesus Christ here makes an allusion to the prior occupation of his apostles. David, in his Psalms, makes similar allusions to his former occupation of shepherd: "He took him from the flocks of sheep, he brought him from following the ewes big with young, to feed Jacob, his servant, and Israel, his inheritance." (Psalm lxxvii. ver. 70.) (Menochius)

**Ver. 21.** It was objected by the ancient enemies of Christianity, Porphyrius, Julian the apostate, and others, that Christ chose for his apostles simple and ignorant men, easy to be imposed upon, and not such as would have been on their guard against deception; thus converting that into an argument against the doctrine of Jesus Christ, which of all other circumstances most solidly and forcibly establishes its divinity and authority. (Salmeron. trac. 25.) --- If Christ had persuaded the ignorant apostles only, there might be some room for such an argument. But if these 12 ignorant men triumphed over the learning, the eloquence, the sophisms of the philosophers themselves, over the strong arm of power in the hands of tyrants, and finally over the devils and passions of men, which were the last to give up the combat against a doctrine that established itself on their ruin, then we may conclude, with St. Paul, that it was wisdom in God to choose the weak things of this world to confound the strong---the foolish and the things that are not, to confound those which are. (Haydock)

**Ver. 23.** The synagogues were religious assemblies with the Jews, wherein they met on the sabbath and festival days, to pray, to read and hear expounded the word of God, and to exercise the other practices of their law. (Calmet)

### **Daily Bible Study Series (non-Catholic)**

THERE is one thing which we must carefully note right at the beginning of our study of the temptations of Jesus, and that is the meaning of the word *to tempt*. The Greek word is *peirazein*. In English the word *tempt* has a uniformly and consistently bad meaning. It always means to entice a man to do wrong, to seek to seduce him into sin, to try to persuade him to take the wrong way. But *peirazein* has a quite different element in its meaning. It means *to test* far more than it means *to tempt* in our sense of the word.

One of the great Old Testament stories is the story of how narrowly Abraham escaped sacrificing his only son Isaac. Now that story begins like this in the Authorized Version "And it came to pass after these things that God did *tempt* Abraham" (Genesis 22:1). Quite clearly the word *to tempt* cannot there mean *to seek to seduce into evil*. It is unthinkable that God should try to make any man a wrong-doer. But the thing is quite clear when we understand that it means: "After these things God *tested* Abraham." The time had come for a supreme test of the loyalty of Abraham. Just as metal has to be tested far beyond any stress and strain that it will ever be called upon to bear, before it can be put to any useful purpose, so a man has to be tested before God can use him for his purposes. The Jews had a saying, "The Holy One, blessed be his name, does not elevate a man to dignity till he has first tried and searched him; and if he stands in temptation, then he raises him to dignity."

Now here is a great and uplifting truth. What we call temptation is not meant to make us sin; it is meant to enable us to conquer sin. It is not meant to make us bad, it is meant to make us good. It is not meant to weaken us, it is meant to make us emerge stronger and finer, and purer from the ordeal. Temptation is not the penalty of being a man, temptation is the glory of being a man. It is the test which comes to a man whom God wishes to use. So, then, we must think of this whole incident, not so much the *tempting*, as the *testing* of Jesus.

We have to note further where this test took place. It took place in *the wilderness*. Between Jerusalem, on the central plateau which is the backbone of Palestine, and the Dead Sea there stretches the wilderness. The Old Testament calls it Jeshimmon, which means The Devastation, and it is a fitting name. It stretches over an area of thirty-five by fifteen miles.

Sir George Adam Smith, who traveled over it, describes it. It is an area of yellow sand, of crumbling limestone, and of scattered shingle. It is an area of contorted strata, where the ridges run in all directions as if they were warped and twisted. The hills are like dust heaps; the limestone is blistered and peeling; rocks are bare and jagged; often the very ground sounds hollow when a foot or a horse's hoof falls upon it. It glows and shimmers with heat like some vast furnace. It runs right out to the Dead Sea, and then there comes a drop of twelve hundred feet, a drop of limestone, flint, and marl, through crags and corries and precipices down to the Dead Sea.

In that wilderness Jesus could be more alone than anywhere else in Palestine. Jesus went into the wilderness to be alone. His task had come to him; God had spoken to him; he must think how he was to attempt the task which God had given him to do; he had to get things straightened out before he started; and he had to be alone.

It may well be that we often go wrong simply because we never try to be alone. There are certain things which a man has to work out alone. There are times when no one else's advice is any good to him. There are times when a man has to stop acting and start thinking. It may be that we make many a mistake because we do not give ourselves a chance to be alone with God.

## THE SACRED STORY

Matthew 4:1–11 (*continued*)

THERE are certain further things we must note before we proceed to detailed study of the story of the temptations.

(i) All three gospel writers seem to stress the immediacy with which the temptations followed the baptism of Jesus. As Mark has it: “The Spirit *immediately* drove him out into the wilderness” (Mark 1:12).

It is one of the truths of life that after every great moment there comes a moment of reaction—and again and again it is in the reaction that the danger lies. That is what happened to Elijah. With magnificent courage Elijah in all his loneliness faced and defeated the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:17–40). That was Elijah’s greatest moment of courage and of witness. But the slaughter of the prophets of Baal provoked the wicked Jezebel to wrath, and she threatened Elijah’s life. “Then he was afraid, and he arose and went for his life and came to Beer-sheba” (1 Kings 19:3) The man who had stood fearlessly against all comers is now fleeing for his life with terror at his heels. The moment of reaction had come.

It seems to be the law of life that just after our resistance power has been highest it nose-dives until it is at its lowest. The tempter carefully, subtly, and skillfully chose his time to attack Jesus—but Jesus conquered him. We will do well to be specially on our guard after every time life has brought us to the heights, for it is just then that we are in gravest danger of the depths.

(ii) We must not regard this experience of Jesus as an outward experience. It was a struggle that went on in his own heart and mind and soul. The proof is that there is no possible mountain from which all the kingdoms of the earth could be seen. This is an inner struggle.

It is through our inmost thoughts and desires that the tempter comes to us. His attack is launched in our own minds. It is true that that attack can be so real that we almost see the devil. To this day you can see the ink-stain on the wall of Luther’s room in the Castle of the Wartburg in Germany; Luther caused that ink-stain by throwing his ink-pot at the devil as he tempted him. But the very power of the devil lies in the fact that he breaches our defenses and attacks us from within. He finds his allies and his weapons in our own inmost thoughts and desires.

(iii) We must not think that in one campaign Jesus conquered the tempter for ever and that the tempter never came to him again. The tempter spoke again to Jesus at Caesarea Philippi when Peter tried to dissuade him from taking the way to the Cross, and when he had to say to Peter the very same words he had said to the tempter in the wilderness. “Begone Satan” (Matthew 16:23). At the end of the day Jesus could say to his disciples, “You are those who have continued with me in my trials” (Luke 22:28).

And never in all history was there such a fight with temptation as Jesus waged in Gethsemane when the tempter sought to deflect him from the Cross (Luke 22:42–44).

“Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom.” In the Christian warfare there is no release. Sometimes people grow worried because they think that they should reach a stage when they are beyond temptation, a stage at which the power of the tempter is forever broken. Jesus never reached that stage. From the beginning to the end of the day he had to fight his battle: that is why he can help us to fight ours.

(iv) One thing stands out about this story—the temptations are such as could only come to a person who had very special powers and who knew that he had them. Sanday described the temptations as “the problem of what to do with supernatural powers.” The temptations which came to Jesus could only have come to one who knew that there were amazing things which he could do.

We must always remember that again and again we are tempted *through our gifts*. The person who is gifted with charm will be tempted to use that charm “to get away with anything.” The person who is gifted with the power of words will be tempted to use his command of words to produce glib excuses to justify his own conduct. The person with a vivid and sensitive imagination will undergo agonies of temptation that a more stolid person will never experience. The person with great gifts of mind will be tempted to use these gifts for himself and not for others, to become the master and not the servant of men. It is the grim fact of temptation that it is just where we are strongest that we must be for ever on the watch.

(v) No one can ever read this story without remembering that its source must have been Jesus himself. In the wilderness he was alone. No one was with him when this struggle was being fought out. And we know about it only because Jesus himself must have told his men about it. It is Jesus telling us his own spiritual autobiography.

We must always approach this story with a unique and special reverence, for in it Jesus is laying bare his inmost heart and soul. He is telling men what he went through. It is the most sacred of all stories, for in it Jesus is saying to us that he can help others who are tempted because he himself was tempted. He draws the veil from his own struggles to help us in our struggle.

## THE ATTACK OF THE TEMPTER

Matthew 4:1–11 (*continued*)

THE tempter launched his attack against Jesus along three lines, and in every one of them there was a certain inevitability.

(i) There was the temptation to turn the stones into bread. The desert was littered with little round pieces of limestone rock which were exactly like little loaves; even they would suggest this temptation to Jesus.

This was a double temptation. It was a temptation to Jesus *to use his powers selfishly and for his own use*, and that is precisely what Jesus always refused to do. There is always the temptation to use selfishly whatever powers God has given to us.

God has given every man a gift, and every man can ask one of two questions. He can ask, "What can I make for myself out of this gift?" or, "What can I do for others with this gift?" This kind of temptation can come out in the simplest thing. A person may possess, for instance, a voice which is good to hear; he may thereupon "cash in on it", and refuse to use it unless he is paid. There is no reason why he should not use it for pay, but there is every reason why he should not use it if only for pay. There is no man who will not be tempted to use selfishly the gift which God has given to him.

But there was another side to this temptation. Jesus was God's Messiah, and he knew it. In the wilderness he was facing the choice of a method whereby he could win men to God. What method was he to use for the task which God had given him to do? How was he to turn the vision into actuality, and the dream into fact?

One sure way to persuade men to follow him was to give them bread, to give them material things. Did not history justify that? Had not God given his people manna in the wilderness? Had God not said, "I will rain bread from heaven for you"? Did not the visions of the future golden age include that very dream? Had not Isaiah said, "They shall not hunger or thirst"? (Isaiah 49:10). Was the Messianic Banquet not a settled feature in the dreams of the kingdom between the Testaments? If Jesus had wished to give men bread, he could have produced justification enough for it.

But to give men bread would have been a double mistake. First, it would have been to bribe men to follow him. It would have been to persuade men to follow him for the sake of what they could get out of it, whereas the reward Jesus had to offer was a Cross. He called men to a life of giving, not of getting. To bribe men with material things would have been the denial of all he came to say and would have been ultimately to defeat his own ends.

Second, it would have been to remove the symptoms without dealing with the disease. Men are hungry. But the question is, *why are they hungry?* Is it because of their own foolishness, and their own shiftlessness and their own carelessness? Is it because there are some who selfishly possess too much while others possess too little? The real way to cure hunger is to remove the causes—and these causes are in men's souls. And above all there is a hunger of the heart which it is not in material things to satisfy.

So Jesus answered the tempter in the very words which express the lesson which God had sought to teach his people in the wilderness: "Man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 8:3). The only way to true satisfaction is the way which has learned complete dependence on God.



(ii) So the tempter renewed his attack from another angle. In a vision he took Jesus to the *pinnacle of the Temple*. That may mean one of two things.

The Temple was built on the top of Mount Sion. The top of the mountain was leveled out into a plateau, and on that plateau the whole area of the Temple buildings stood. There was one corner at which Solomon's porch and the Royal porch met, and at that corner there was a sheer drop of four hundred and fifty feet into the valley of the Kedron below. Why should not Jesus stand on that pinnacle, and leap down, and land unharmed in the valley beneath? Men would be startled into following a man who could do a thing like that.

On the top of the roof of the Temple itself there was a stance where every morning a priest stood with a trumpet in his hands, waiting for the first flush of the dawn across the hills of Hebron. At the first dawn light he sounded the trumpet to tell men that the hour of morning sacrifice had come. Why should not Jesus stand there, and leap down right into the Temple court, and amaze men into following him? Had not Malachi said, "the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his Temple"? (Malachi 3:1). Was there not a promise that the angels would bear God's man upon their hands lest any harm should come to him? (Psalm 91:11, 12).

This was the very method that the false Messiahs who were continually arising promised. Theudas had led the people out, and had promised with a word to split the waters of Jordan in two. The famous Egyptian pretender (Acts 21:38) had promised that with a word he would lay flat the walls of Jerusalem. Simon Magus, so it is said, had promised to fly through the air, and had perished in the attempt. These pretenders had offered sensations which they could not perform. Jesus could perform anything he promised. Why should he not do it?

There were two good reasons why Jesus should not adopt that course of action. First, he who seeks to attract men to him by providing them with sensations has adopted a way in which there is literally no future. The reason is simple. To retain his power he must produce ever greater and greater sensations. Wonders are apt to be nine day wonders. This year's sensation is next year's commonplace. A gospel founded on sensation-mongering is foredoomed to failure. Second, that is not the way to use the power of God." You shall not put the Lord your God to the test," said Jesus (Deuteronomy 6:16). He meant this; there is no good in putting yourself deliberately into a threatening situation, and doing it quite recklessly and needlessly, and then expecting God to rescue you from it.

God expects a man to take risks in order to be true to him, but he does not expect him to take risks to enhance his own prestige. The very faith which is dependent on signs and wonder is not faith. If faith cannot believe without sensations it is not really faith., it is doubt looking for proof and looking in the wrong place. God's rescuing power is not something to be played and experimented with, it is something to be quietly trusted in the life of every day.

Jesus refused the way of sensations because he knew that it was the way to failure—it still is—and because to long for sensations is not to trust, but to distrust, God.

(iii) So the tempter tried his third avenue of attack. It was the world that Jesus came to save, and into his mind there came a picture of the world. The tempting voice said: “Fall down and worship me, and I will give you all the kingdoms of this world.” Had not God himself said to his chosen one, “Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession”? (Psalm 2:8).

What the tempter was saying was, “Compromise! Come to terms with me! Don’t pitch your demands quite so high! Wink just a little at evil and questionable things—and then people will follow you in their hordes.” This was the temptation to come to terms with the world, instead of uncompromisingly presenting God’s demands to it. It was the temptation to try to advance by retreating, to try to change the world by becoming like the world.

Back came Jesus’ answer: “You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him and swear by his name” (Deuteronomy 6:13). Jesus was quite certain that we can never defeat evil by compromising with evil. He laid down the uncompromisingness of the Christian faith. Christianity cannot stoop to the level of the world; it must lift the world to its own level. Nothing less will do.

So Jesus made his decision. He decided that he must never bribe men into following him; he decided that the way of sensations was not for him; he decided that there could be no compromise in the message he preached and in the faith he demanded. That choice inevitably meant the Cross—but the Cross just as inevitably meant the final victory.

## THE SON OF GOD GOES FORTH

Matthew 4:12–17

When Jesus heard that John had been delivered into the hands of the authorities, he withdrew into Galilee. He left Galilee and came and made his home in Capernaum, which is on the lake-side, in the districts of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was done that there might be fulfilled that which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, when he said, “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, by the way of sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and a light has risen for those who sat in the land and in the shadow of death.” From that time Jesus began to proclaim his message and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has come near!”

BEFORE very long disaster came to John. He was arrested and imprisoned in the dungeons of the Castle of Machaerus by Herod the king. His crime was that he had publicly denounced Herod for seducing his brother’s wife, and making her his own wife, after he had put away the wife he had. It is never safe to rebuke an eastern despot, and

John's courage brought him first imprisonment and then death. We shall come later to the details of that story which Matthew does not tell until Matthew 14:3–12.

For Jesus the time had come when he must go forth to his task.

Let us note what he did first of all. He left Nazareth and he took up residence in the town of Capernaum. There was a kind of symbolic finality in that move. In that moment Jesus left his home never again to return to live in it. It is as if he shut the door that lay behind him before he opened the door that stood in front of him. It was the clean cut between the old and the new. One chapter was ended and another had begun. Into life there come these moments of decision. It is always better to meet them with an even surgical cut than to vacillate undecided between two courses of action.

Let us note where Jesus went. He went into Galilee. When Jesus went into Galilee to begin his mission and his ministry, he knew what he was doing. Galilee was the most northerly district of Palestine. It stretched from the Litany River in the north to the Plain of Esdraelon in the south. On the west it did not reach the sea coast of the Mediterranean, because the coastal strip was in the possession of the Phoenicians. On the north-east it was bounded by Syria, and its eastern limit was the waters of the Sea of Galilee. Galilee was not large; it was only fifty miles from north to south, and twenty-five miles from east to west.

But, small as it was, Galilee was densely populated. It was by far the most fertile region of Palestine; its fertility was indeed phenomenal and proverbial. There was a saying that it was easier to raise a legion of olives in Galilee than it was to bring up one child in Judea. Josephus, who was at one time governor of the province, says, "It is throughout rich in soil and pasturage, producing every variety of tree, and inviting by its productiveness even those who have the least inclination for agriculture; it is everywhere tilled; no part is allowed to lie idle, and everywhere it is productive." The result of this was that for its size Galilee had an enormous population. Josephus tells us that in it there were two hundred and four villages, none with a population of fewer than fifteen thousand people. So, then, Jesus began his mission in that part of Palestine where there were most people to hear him; he began his work in an area teeming with men to whom the gospel proclamation might be made.

But not only was Galilee a populous district; its people were people of a certain kind. Of all parts of Palestine Galilee was most open to new ideas. Josephus says of the Galileans, "They were ever fond of innovations, and by nature disposed to changes, and delighted in seditions." They were ever ready to follow a leader and to begin an insurrection. They were notoriously quick in temper and given to quarreling. Yet withal they were the most chivalrous of men. "the Galileans," said Josephus, "have never been destitute of courage." "Cowardice was never a characteristic of the Galileans." "They were ever more anxious for honor than for gain." The inborn characteristics of the Galileans were such as to make them most fertile ground for a new gospel to be preached to them.

This openness to new ideas was due to certain facts.

(i) The name *Galilee* comes from the Hebrew word *galil* which means a *circle*. The full name of the area was *Galilee of the Gentiles*. Plummer wishes to take that to mean “heathenish Galilee.” But the phrase came from the fact that Galilee was literally surrounded by Gentiles. On the west, the Phoenicians were its neighbors. To the north and the east, there were the Syrians. And even to the south, there lay the territory of the Samaritans. Galilee was in fact the one part of Palestine that was inevitably in touch with non-Jewish influences and ideas. Galilee was bound to be open to new ideas in a way that no other part of Palestine was.

(ii) The great roads of the world passed through Galilee, as we saw when we were thinking of the town of Nazareth. The Way of the Sea led from Damascus through Galilee right down to Egypt and to Africa. The Road to the East led through Galilee away out to the frontiers. The traffic of the world passed through Galilee. Away in the south Judea is tucked into a corner, isolated and secluded. As it has been well said, “Judea is on the way to nowhere: Galilee is on the way to everywhere.” Judea could erect a fence and keep all foreign influence and all new ideas out; Galilee could never do that. Into Galilee the new ideas were bound to come.

(iii) Galilee’s geographical position had affected its history. Again and again it had been invaded and conquered, and the tides of the foreigners had often flowed over it and had sometimes engulfed it.

Originally it had been assigned to the tribes of Asher, Naphtali and Zebulun when the Israelites first came into the land (Joshua 9) but these tribes had never been completely successful in expelling the native Canaanite inhabitants, and from the beginning the population of Galilee was mixed. More than once foreign invasions from the north and east had swept down on it from Syria, and in the eighth century B.C. the Assyrians had engulfed it completely, the greater part of its population had been taken away into exile, and strangers had been settled in the land. Inevitably this brought a very large injection of foreign blood into Galilee.

From the eighth until the second century B.C. it had been largely in Gentile hands. When the Jews returned from exile under Nehemiah and Ezra, many of the Galileans came south to live in Jerusalem. In 164 B.C. Simon Maccabaeus chased the Syrians north from Galilee back to their own territory; and on his way back he took with him to Jerusalem the remnants of the Galileans who were left.

The most amazing thing of all is that in 104 B.C. Aristobulus reconquered Galilee for the Jewish nation, and proceeded forcibly to circumcise the inhabitants of Galilee, and thus to make them Jews whether they liked it or not. History had compelled Galilee to open its doors to new strains of blood and to new ideas and to new influences.

The natural characteristics of the Galileans, and the preparation of history had made Galilee the one place in all Palestine where a new teacher with a new message had any

real chance of being heard, and it was there that Jesus began his mission and first announced his message.

## THE HERALD OF GOD

Matthew 4:12–17 (*continued*)

BEFORE we leave this passage there are certain other things which we must note.

It was to the town of Capernaum that Jesus went. The correct form of the name is *Capharnaum*. The form *Capernaum* does not occur at all until the fifth century A.D., but it is so fixed in our minds and memories that it would not be wise to try to change it.

There has been much argument about the site of Capernaum. Two places have been suggested. The commonest, and the likeliest identification is that Capernaum is Tell Hum, which is on the west side of the extreme north of the Sea of Galilee; the alternative, and the less likely, identification is that Capernaum is Khan Minyeh, which is about two and a half miles to the south-west of Tell Hum. In any event, there is now nothing but ruins left to show where Capernaum once stood.

It was Matthew's habit to find in the Old Testament something which he could use as a prophecy about every event in Jesus' life. He finds such a prophecy in Isaiah 9:1, 2. In fact that is another of the prophecies which Matthew tears violently from its context and uses in his own extraordinary way. It is a prophecy which dates back to the reign of Pekah. In those days the northern parts of Palestine, including Galilee, had been despoiled by the invading armies of the Assyrians; and this was originally a prophecy of the deliverance which would some day come to these conquered territories. Matthew finds in it a prophecy which foretold of the light that Jesus was to bring.

Finally, Matthew gives us a brief one-sentence summary of the message which Jesus brought. The Authorized Version and Revised Standard Version both say that Jesus began to *preach*. The word *preach* has come down in the world; it is all too unfortunately connected in the minds of many people with boredom. The word in Greek is *kērussein*, which is the word for a herald's proclamation from a king. *Kērux* is the Greek word for herald, and the herald was the man who brought a message direct from the king.

This word tells us of certain characteristics of the preaching of Jesus and these are characteristics which should be in all preaching.

(i) The herald had in his voice a note of *certainty*. There was no doubt about his message; he did not come with perhapses and maybes and probably's; he came with a definite message. Goethe had it: "Tell me of your certainties: I have doubts enough of my own." Preaching is the proclamation of certainties, and a man cannot make others sure of that about which he himself is in doubt.

(ii) The herald had in his voice the note of *authority*. He was speaking for the king; he was laying down and announcing the king's law, the king's command, and the king's decision. As was said of a great preacher, "he did not cloudily guess; he knew." Preaching, as it has been put, is the application of prophetic authority to the present situation.

(iii) The herald's message came from *a source beyond himself*; it came from the king. Preaching speaks from a source beyond the preacher. It is not the expression of one man's personal opinions; it is the voice of God that Jesus spoke to men.

The message of Jesus consisted of a command which was the consequence of a new situation. "Repent!" he said. "Turn from your own ways, and turn to God. Lift your eyes from earth and look to heaven. Reverse your direction, and stop walking away from God and begin walking towards God." That command had become urgently necessary because the reign of God was about to begin. Eternity had invaded time; God had invaded earth in Jesus Christ, and therefore it was of paramount importance that a man should choose the right side and the right direction.

## CHRIST CALLS THE FISHERMEN

Matthew 4:18–22

While he was walking beside the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother casting their net into the sea, for they were fishermen. He said to them "Follow me, and I will make you fishers on men." They immediately left their nets and followed him. He went on from there and saw another two brothers, James, Zebedee's son, and John, his brother. They were in the boat with Zebedee their father getting ready their nets for use. So he called them. They immediately left their boat and their father, and followed him.

ALL Galilee centered round the Sea of Galilee. It is thirteen miles long from north to south, and eight miles across from east to west. The Sea of Galilee is therefore small, and it is interesting to note that Luke, the Gentile, who had seen so much more of the world, never calls it the *sea (thalassa)*, but always the *lake (limnē)*. It is the shape of an oval, wider at the top than at the bottom. It lies in that great rift in the earth's surface in which the Jordan valley runs, and the surface of the Sea of Galilee is six hundred and eighty feet below sea level. The fact that it lies in this dip in the earth's surface gives it a very warm climate, and makes the surrounding countryside phenomenally fertile. It is one of the loveliest lakes in the world. W. M. Thomson describes it: "Seen from any point of the surrounding heights it is a fine sheet of water—a burnished mirror set in a framework of rounded hills and rugged mountains, which rise and roll backward and upward to where Hermon hangs the picture against the blue vault of heaven."

In the days of Josephus there were no fewer than nine populous cities on its shore. In the 1930's, when H. V. Morton saw it, only Tiberias was left and it was little more than a village. Today it is the largest town in Galilee and steadily growing.

In the time of Jesus the Sea of Galilee was thick with fishing boats. Josephus on a certain expedition had no difficulty in assembling two hundred and forty fishing boats to set out from Tarichaea; but nowadays the fishermen are few and far between.

There were three methods of fishing. There was fishing by line.

There was fishing with the casting net. The casting net was circular, and might be as much as nine feet across. It was skillfully cast into the water from the land, or from the shallow water at the edge of the lake. It was weighted with pellets of lead round the circumference. It sank into the sea and surrounded the fishes; it was then drawn through the water as if the top of a bell tent were being drawn to land, and in it the fish were caught. That was the kind of net that Peter and Andrew, and James and John, were handling when Jesus saw them. Its name was the *amphiblēstron*.

The drag net was used from a boat, or better from two boats. It was cast into the water with ropes at each of the four corners. It was weighted at the foot so that, as it were, it stood upright in the water. When the boats were rowed along with the net behind them, the effect was that the net became a great cone, and in the cone the fishes were caught and brought into the boat. This kind of net is the net in the parable of the dragnet; and is called the *sagene*.

So Jesus was walking by the lakeside; and as he walked he called Peter and Andrew, James and John. It is not to be thought that this was the first time that he had seen them, or they him. As John tells the story, at least some of them were already disciples of John the Baptist (John 1:35). No doubt they had already talked with Jesus and had already listened to him, but in this moment there came to them the challenge once and for all to throw in their lot with him.

The Greeks used to tell how Xenophon first met Socrates. Socrates met him in a narrow lane and barred his path with his stick. First of all Socrates asked him if he knew where he could buy this and that, and if he knew where this and that were made. Xenophon gave the required information. Then Socrates asked him, "Do you know where men are made good and virtuous?" "No," said the young Xenophon. "Then," said Socrates, "follow me and learn!"

Jesus, too, called on these fishermen to follow him. It is interesting to note what kind of men they were. They were not men of great scholarship, or influence, or wealth, or social background. They were not poor, they were simple working people with no great background, and certainly, anyone would have said, with no great future.

It was these ordinary men whom Jesus chose. Once there came to Socrates a very ordinary man called Aeschines. "I am a poor man," said Aeschines. "I have nothing else, but I give you myself." "Do you not see," said Socrates, "that you are giving me the most precious thing of all?" What Jesus needs is ordinary folk who will give him themselves. He can do anything with people like that.

Further these men were fishermen. It has been pointed out by many scholars that the good fisherman must possess these very qualities which will turn him into the good fishers of men.

(i) He must have *patience*. He must learn to wait patiently until the fish will take the bait. If he is restless and quick to move he will never make a fisherman. The good fisher of men will have need of patience. It is but rarely in preaching or in teaching that we will see quick results. We must learn to wait.

(ii) He must have *perseverance*. He must learn never to be discouraged, but always to try again. The good preacher and teacher must not be discouraged when nothing seems to happen. He must always be ready to try again.

(iii) He must have *courage*. As the old Greek said when he prayed for the protection of the gods: "My boat is so small and the sea is so large." He must be ready to risk and to face the fury of the sea and of the gale. The good preacher and teacher must be well aware that there is always a danger in telling men the truth. The man who tells the truth, more often than not takes his reputation and his life in his hands.

(iv) he must have *an eye for the right moment*. The wise fisherman knows well that there are times when it is hopeless to fish. He knows when to cast and when not to cast. The good preacher and teacher chooses his moment. There are times when men will welcome the truth, and times when they will resent the truth. There are times when the truth will move them, and times when the truth will harden them in their opposition to the truth. The wise preacher and teacher knows that there is a time to speak and a time to be silent.

(v) He must *fit the bait to the fish*. One fish will rise to one bait and another to another. Paul said that he became all things to all men if by any chance he might win some. The wise preacher and teacher knows that the same approach will not win all men. He may even have to know and recognize his own limitations. He may have to discover that there are certain spheres in which he himself can work, and others in which he cannot.

(v) The wise fisherman must *keep himself out of sight*. If he obtrudes his own presence, even his own shadow, the fish will certainly not bite. The wise preacher and teacher will always seek to present men, not with himself, but with Jesus Christ. his aim is to fix men's eyes, not on himself, but on that figure beyond.

## THE METHODS OF THE MASTER

Matthew 4:23–25

Jesus made a circular tour of Galilee, teaching in the Synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of diseases and ailments among the people: and the report of his activities went out all over Syria. So they brought to



him all those who were ill, those who were in the grip of the most varied diseases and pains, those who were paralysed; and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, and from the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan.

JESUS had chosen to begin his mission in Galilee, and we have seen how well-prepared Galilee was to receive the seed. Within Galilee Jesus chose to launch his campaign in the synagogues.

The synagogue was the most important institution in the life of any Jew. There was a difference between the synagogues and the Temple. There was only one Temple, the Temple in Jerusalem, but wherever there was the smallest colony of Jews there was a synagogue. The Temple existed solely for the offering of sacrifice; in it there was no preaching or teaching. The synagogue was essentially a teaching institution. The synagogues have been defined as “the popular religious universities of their day.” If a man had any religious teaching or religious ideas to disseminate, the synagogue was unquestionably the place to start.

Further, the synagogue service was such that it gave the new teacher his chance. In the synagogue service there were three parts. The first part consisted of prayers. The second part consisted of readings from the Law and from the Prophets, readings in which members of the congregation took part. The third part was the address. The important fact is that there was no one person to give the address. There was no such thing as a professional ministry. The president of the synagogue presided over the arrangements for the service. Any distinguished stranger could be asked to give the address, and anyone with a message to give might volunteer to give it; and, if the ruler or president of the synagogue judged him to be a fit person to speak, he was allowed to speak. Thus, at the beginning, the door of the synagogue and the pulpit of the synagogue were open to Jesus. He began in the synagogue because it was there he would find the most sincerely religious people of his day, and the way to speak to them was open to him. After the address there came a time for talk, and questions, and discussion. The synagogue was the ideal place in which to get a new teaching across to the people.

But not only did Jesus preach; he also healed the sick. It was little wonder that reports of what he was doing went out and people came crowding to hear him, and to see him, and to benefit from his pity.

They came from Syria. Syria was the great province of which Palestine was only a part. It stretched away to the north and the north-east with the great city of Damascus as its center. It so happens that one of the loveliest legends passed down to us by Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 1:13) goes back to this time. The story goes that there was a king called Abgar, in Edessa, and he was ill. So, it is said, he wrote to Jesus: “Abgar, ruler of Edessa, to Jesus, the most excellent Savior, who has appeared in the country of Jerusalem—greeting. I have heard of you and of your cures, performed without medicine and without herb; for, it is said, you make the blind to see and the

lame to walk, you cleanse the lepers, you cast out evil spirits and demons, you heal those afflicted with lingering diseases, and you raise the dead. Now, as I have heard all this about you, I have concluded that one of two things must be true; either, you are God, and having descended from heaven you do these things, or else, you are a son of God by what you do. I write to you, therefore, to ask you to come and cure the disease from which I am suffering. For I have heard that the Jews murmur against you, and devise evil things against you. Now, I have a very small but an excellent city which is large enough for both of us." Jesus was said to have written back: "Blessed are you for having believed in me without seeing me. For it is written concerning me that those who have seen me will not believe in me, while they who have not seen me will believe and be saved. But, as to your request that I should come to you, I must fulfill all things here for which I have been sent, and, after fulfilling them, be taken up again to him who sent me. Yet, after I am taken up, I will send you one of my disciples to cure your disease, and to give life to you and to yours." So, the legend goes on, Thaddeus went to Edessa and cured Abgar. It is only a legend, but it does show how men believed that even in distant Syria men had heard of Jesus and longed with all their hearts for the help and the healing which he alone could give.

Very naturally they came from Galilee, and the word about Jesus had spread south to Jerusalem and Judea also, and they came from there. They came from the land across the Jordan, which was known as Peraea, and which stretched from Pella in the North to Arabia Petra in the south. They came from the Decapolis. The Decapolis was a federation of ten independent Greek cities, all of which, except Scythopolis, were on the far side of the Jordan.

This list is symbolic, for in it we see not only the Jews but the Gentiles also coming to Jesus Christ for what he alone could give them. Already the ends of the earth are gathering to him.

## THE ACTIVITIES OF JESUS

Matthew 4:23–25 (*continued*)

THIS passage is of great importance because it gives us in brief summary the three great activities of Jesus' life.

(i) He came *proclaiming* the gospel, or, as the A. V. and RSV have it, he came *preaching*. Now, as we have already seen, preaching is the proclamation of certainties. Therefore, *Jesus came to defeat men's ignorance*. He came to tell them the truth about God, to tell them that which by themselves they could never have found out. He came to put an end to guessing and to groping, and to show men what God is like.

(ii) He came *teaching* in the synagogues. What is the difference between *teaching* and *preaching*? Preaching is the uncompromising proclamation of certainties; teaching is the explanation of the meaning and the significance of them. Therefore, *Jesus came to defeat men's misunderstandings*. There are times when men know the truth and

misinterpret it They know the truth and draw the wrong conclusions from it. Jesus came to tell men the meaning of true religion.

(iii) He came *healing* all those who had need of healing. That is to say, *Jesus came to defeat men's pain*. The important thing about Jesus is that he was not satisfied with simply telling men the truth in *words*; he came to turn that truth into deeds. Florence Allshorn, the great missionary teacher, said, "an ideal is never yours until it comes out of your finger tips." The ideal is not yours until it is realized in action. Jesus realized his own teaching in deeds of help and healing.

Jesus came *preaching* that he might defeat all *ignorance*, he came *teaching* that he might defeat all *misunderstandings*. He came *healing* that he might defeat all *pain*. We, too, must proclaim our certainties; we, too, must be ready to explain our faith; we, too, must turn the ideal into action and into deeds.