

**Intro:**

We began our series with a look at the beginning of the nations.

- What is the essential social notion behind the idea of nations? *division*
- What is the divine purpose for dividing men into nations? *to prompt men to seek God*

Today we are going to turn to the New Testament, to the beginning statement about the ministry of our Lord. It is very interesting to me how this is presented and who presents it.

Read Mt 4.12-17

Each of the four Gospels presents the beginning of the Lord's ministry in a different way.

Mark refers very briefly to this, giving us basically just a summary of the Lord's preaching theme. Mark is concerned with action, so having announced the theme he swings into the action of the Lord's ministry.

Luke expands the beginning of the Lord's ministry by describing his rejection at Nazareth and move to Capernaum. The record in Luke is more detailed than that in Matthew.

John begins in a different way giving us a six-month 'prequel' that includes his first meeting with some of his disciples, the water to wine, cleansing the temple, Nicodemus and the woman at Samaria. Then we come to the point of the beginning of the Lord's Galilean ministry. I want to look at a few of the passages in John's Gospel before we get to Matthew.

Jn 4.43-46 ? Note Galilean reception, towns mentioned

Jn 1.11 ? his own *things* [Temple, City] vs. his own *people*

Now let's look over at Luke

Lk 4.14-16, 28-29 ? note the rage and rejection in Nazareth

Lk 4.31 ? note the location

The transition from Nazareth to Capernaum is, I think, a miniature of the transition from Judea to Galilee.

Everywhere in John's Gospel we see those opposing Jesus referred to as 'the Jews'. *His own received him not.*

Nazareth is an out of the way town, unknown in the OT (as is Capernaum), but what little we know of its history is that after the Jewish Revolt in the late 60s, it was known as a village where some of the priestly families lived. The archaeological artifacts in Nazareth have not produced any “remains with pagan symbolism.”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, Nazareth during the time of Christ was probably a very *Jewish* village in Galilee. In light of that fact, consider their opposition to Jesus. *His own received him not.*

Now let's go back to Mt 4

Read Mt 4.12-13

Remember two things about Matthew:

- Matthew's Gospel was written as a discipleship manual for Jewish Christians.
- Matthew is more interested in noting fulfilled prophecy than any other Gospel writer.

**Proposition:** The mission of Christ is comprehended for this age in this phrase: a light to the Gentiles.

## I. Settled in Capernaum

A. A great spiritual danger: the Lord accepts rejection

1. Rejected at his initial foray into Galilee at the beginning of his ministry, moves to Capernaum
2. Unwilling to work miracles among them because of unbelief (Mt 13.53-58)

The Lord in this age does not impose his will on men. He will accept rejection.

- All of those people who rejected him in Nazareth back then are dead.
- Unless they received him, they have spent 2000 years in hell already.

<sup>1</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, Publishers Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985). 689.

B. A significant ‘demographic’ difference: Galilee of the Gentiles  
[Capernaum home base]

1. Capernaum is also a Jewish town, but a crossroads town
2. People of every nation traveling through
3. Roman garrison established there
  - a. Centurion built the synagogue in Nazareth
  - b. Has been uncovered, an exceptionally beautiful synagogue
4. In other words, a mixed city ... just like Galilee

“Originally a district in the hill country of Naphtali (2 Kin. 15:29; 1 Chr. 6:76), Galilee was inhabited by a ‘mixed race’ of Jews and heathen. The Canaanites continued to dominate Galilee for many years after Joshua’s invasion (Judg. 1:30–33; 4:2). It was historically known among the Jews as ‘Galilee of the Gentiles’ (Is. 9:1; Matt. 4:15).

“Galilee had such a mixed population that Solomon could award unashamedly to Hiram, king of Tyre, 20 of its cities in payment for timber from Lebanon (1 Kin. 9:11). After conquest by Tiglath–Pileser, king of Assyria (about 732 b.c.), Galilee was repopulated by a colony of heathen immigrants (2 Kin. 15:29; 17:24).”<sup>2</sup>

“[Galilee] originally formed part of the lands allocated to the twelve tribes, but, owing to the pressure from peoples farther north, its Jewish population found themselves in a kind of [Northern] salient, surrounded on three sides by non-Jewish populations—‘the nations’. Under the Maccabees, the Gentile influence upon the Jews became so strong that the latter were actually withdrawn [South] for half a century. Thus Galilee had to be recolonized, and this fact, together with its diversity of population, contributed to the contempt felt for the Galileans by the [Southern] Jews (Jn. 7:52).”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ronald F. Youngblood, *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary : An Authoritative One-Volume Reference Work on the Bible With Full Color Illustrations*, ed. F.F. Bruce, electronic ed. of the revised ed. of Nelson’s illustrated Bible dictionary. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995).

<sup>3</sup> D. R. W. Wood, *New Bible Dictionary* (InterVarsity Press, 1996, c1982, c1962). 394.

- The significance of these verses is that Jesus is located, for the bulk of his ministry, in a Jewish region with a *significant* Gentile population.

## II. Serving in Galilee

### A. In fulfillment of prophecy

1. Prophecy uttered by Isaiah at a time when Galilee is under heavy Gentile influence
  - a. Galilee was part of the Northern Kingdom of Israel
  - b. Israel was going through a rapid series of kings: coups, assassinations, instability
  - c. The Assyrian empire to the North moved in to stabilize situations and placed one of their own puppets on the throne of Israel (who would later rebel)
2. The king of Judah in the south was Ahaz (father of Hezekiah)
  - a. Ahaz a wicked king
  - b. Great spiritual darkness in both kingdoms

In this context, then, Isaiah uttered his prophecy

### Read *Is 9.1-2, Mt 4.14-16*

What light did they see?

### B. As a great light among spiritually dark people

1. The centurion's servant (Mt 8.5-13, see esp. 11-12)
2. The Gadarene demoniacs (Mt 8.28-34)
3. The Syro Phoenician woman's daughter (Mt 15.21-28, see esp. 28)
4. The deaf mute of Decapolis (Mk 7.31-37)
5. The feeding of the 4,000 (Mt 15.32-38)

The Lord's ministry in his lifetime was primarily to the Jewish people, *his own*. But the Gentiles who surrounded him had a privilege of seeing the great light – some of them with greater clarity than the unbelieving Jews.

### III. Sounding the gospel of repentance (Mt 4.17)

#### A. The theme of Christ's preaching

##### 1. Repentance

- a. Lit.: 'to change one's mind', *i.e.*, about something one has done
- b. Thayer: "used especially of those who, conscious of their sins and with manifest tokens of sorrow, are intent on obtaining God's pardon"<sup>4</sup>
- c. It "expresses mental direction"<sup>5</sup> — *i.e.*, **repentance** is a journey, the journey of faith

##### 2. On account of kingdom opportunity

- a. The kingdom of heaven was literally 'at hand' — *i.e.*, present — in the form of the king
- b. The kingdom of heaven is still at hand — to be entered in faith

The great light still lightens Gentiles, if they will repent and believe.

#### B. The mission of Christian preaching

**Matthew 28:19** Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: <sup>20</sup> Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

1. Make disciples of all nations
2. I am with you to the end of the age

In light of this mission, and knowing my theme this week, I was quite interested to see reports in our papers concerning our Canadian population:

"2006 CENSUS HIGHLIGHTS: - One in five people in Canada was born in another country. - Foreign-born population grew four times faster than Canadian-born population between 2001 and 2006, 13.6% compared to 3.3% - Anglophones, with English as their mother

<sup>4</sup> Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

<sup>5</sup> Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

tongue, remained a majority in Canada, accounting for 57.8% of the total population, compared with 59.1% in 2001. - Chinese languages were the third most common mother tongue, after English and French. After Chinese, the most common foreign languages spoken in Canadian homes were Italian, Punjabi, Spanish, German, Tagalog and Arabic. - For the first time, seven out of 10 immigrants reported a mother tongue other than English or French.”<sup>6</sup>

What does this mean for us?

- For some, the rise of immigration is a cause of concern, even of fear.
- For the servants of Christ, who came as a light to the Gentiles, it is a cause of hope and *ought* to motivate our mission.

## Conclusion:

Let’s pray that God will grant us the opportunity and grace to lift up The Great Light of Christ to the Gentiles around us – ‘traditional Canadians’ and new Canadians alike.

May they see their hope in repentance from sin and faith in Christ!

<sup>6</sup> National Post: “Canada takes stock of a changing country” Dec 5, 2007.  
[http://www.nationalpost.com/todays\\_paper/story.html?id=145236](http://www.nationalpost.com/todays_paper/story.html?id=145236) (accessed 12.8.2007)