

## **THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' MINISTRY.**

– *Jan. 16.* – *Matt. 4:17-25.* –

"The people which sat in darkness saw a great Light."

FOR a while after the temptation of the wilderness our Lord's ministry was of a private character, until after John had finished his ministry and been cast into prison. This interim of time before our Lord began his public work is frequently estimated at from six months to a year. To have begun sooner might have aroused some rivalry between his followers and the followers of John; but even as it was, we are informed that Jesus baptized more disciples than John, tho Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples. The calling of Peter and Andrew mentioned in this lesson was not their first introduction to Jesus, but merely our Lord's invitation to them to become special associates in the work of proclaiming the Kingdom. The account of their first introduction to Jesus is found in John 1:36-42. Our Lord evidently resided for some time at Nazareth with his mother and brethren, – until the time of John's imprisonment and the consequent stoppage of his mission-work. It was then that our Lord with his mother and brethren removed as a family to Capernaum. (Compare Matt. 4:13; John 2:12.) "From that time Jesus began to preach, and say, Repent; for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

For centuries Israel had been looking for the Kingdom of Heaven – the Kingdom of God – expecting according to their covenant that the chief place in that Kingdom should be theirs, as the servants of God, the ministers of righteousness and truth; and that they should be used of the Almighty to rule and instruct all nations: in fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham, that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed. All true Israelites had this promise distinctly before their minds as their great hope, and indeed the only object of their national existence. – See Acts 26:6,7.

To these, therefore, the proclamation, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," meant, – God's time has now come for the fulfilment of his promise to this nation, in its establishment as his representative kingdom to rule and to bless the world; but in order to be fit for this Kingdom every Israelite should prepare his heart, humble himself before God, repenting of sins and thereby reforming his life, seeking a readiness for the divine blessing and exaltation, in whatever form it might come. This message was the same which John delivered in his public ministry; the same also that was given to the twelve disciples, and afterwards to the seventy also, whom Jesus sent forth, clothed with a share of his power over diseases and unclean spirits, to announce him in all the cities which he later would visit.

Thus did God fulfil toward Israel both the letter and the spirit of his engagement; but while the people of Palestine were the children of Abraham, and professedly God's covenant people, yet with the vast majority this was but an empty profession and an outward form; for their hopes respecting the great promise of which they were heirs were not the proper, laudable ambitions to be God's servants and messengers in carrying his blessings to mankind, but a selfish, arrogant pride, which concluded that there must have been some special merit in their race, which led God to seek it, and on account of which God would be rather obligated to that nation, as the only people capable of carrying out his benevolent designs. Against this arrogance our Lord warned them frequently; and assured them that God could get along without them entirely, and was able to raise up for his purpose, instead of them, children of Abraham, who would have Abraham's loyalty of spirit, – even if it were necessary to create these out of the stones. (Matt. 3:9; Luke 3:8.) As a matter of fact we know that after the "wheat" class had been separated from the "chaff" of that nation, and been gathered into the Gospel "garner," the Lord has been seeking others from among the Gentiles during the past eighteen centuries, to complete the elect number of Israelites indeed, the true seed of Abraham, to constitute this promised Heavenly Kingdom, whose mission it shall be, as the divine representatives, to bless all the

families of the earth – "in the world to come" – in the age to follow this Gospel age – in the Millennium.

And the same message, "Repent, etc.," has come all the way down the centuries, notifying us that whoever would be of this holy Kingdom must reform his course of life and come into heart-harmony with the laws of this Kingdom: Otherwise they would not be in a condition to be made members of the "royal priesthood" which is to offer the great blessings which God has designed and promised to the world.

While the four fishermen mentioned in this lesson were already at heart disciples of our Lord Jesus, and recognized him as the Messiah, this was the first call to *public ministry* as his colaborers, and their promptness in obeying the call is worthy of notice as a mark [R2246 : page 14] of their earnestness and faith; for our Master declared, He that obeyeth my words he it is that loveth me, and he shall be loved of my Father. There is a good lesson here on promptness of obedience for all of the Lord's people. It is worthy of note also that our Lord called to the special, active service of preaching the Gospel, men who were not "slothful in business:" they [R2246 : page 15] were not idlers, nor did they join the Lord's company with the expectation of becoming idlers. Doubtless they had already heard our Lord's dissertation to the effect that no man need come after him except prepared to take up a cross in the service. No doubt they knew already that our Lord was poor and without standing before the influential of that day. Nevertheless, they gladly joined his company upon his assurance that under his direction, altho their work would be no less arduous, they should be "fishers of men."

For a considerable time our Lord's ministries were confined to Galilee, except as occasionally he went up to Jerusalem on national holidays. His message is called the gospel – the good news: because Israelites, like the rest of the groaning creation, had been long waiting for the promised Golden Age, when all the bitterness of the curse

would be removed, and when the blessings of the Lord would come down richly and bountifully upon the earth. It was indeed good news then as it is good news now to *everyone that believeth*. But then, as now, it was difficult to believe. Then the Scribes and Pharisees and Doctors of the Law rejected Jesus, repudiated his claims and jested about him and his followers, that they must be lunatics to think that any knowledge on this subject of the Kingdom of God could come through the carpenter and some fishermen associates, and not through the great and notable Chief Priests, Scribes, Pharisees and Doctors. Moreover, they ridiculed the fact that without wealth and social influence, and by the preaching of the Gospel of repentance, an army could ever be raised which could vanquish the Roman legions, and deliver Israel and conquer the world before her, so as to give her the chief position of authority as the Kingdom of God. Their hearts being in the wrong condition, the religious rulers were less prepared to grasp the truth then due than were the hearts of the humble, faithful, unlearned fishermen. Likewise to-day, the Doctors of Divinity and all the socially and religiously great of Christendom scout the idea of the establishment of the Kingdom by the power of God in the hands of Christ and his little flock of the royal priesthood; and declare on the other hand that *they* are the Lord's Kingdom, and leave us to infer that notwithstanding all the pride and crime and ungodliness abounding in so-called Christendom, nevertheless, God's will is "done on earth *as* it is done in heaven." And, with their show of wealth and power and learning and dignity and influence they say to-day as the Scribes and Pharisees said of old – Have any of the great ones of church or state believed in this coming Kingdom of God which you preach, saying that the Kingdom of heaven is *at hand*, and the elect membership being gathered? The answer to the question now, as in the past, must be No; not many great, not many wise, not many rich, not many learned according to the course of this world have believed in the coming Kingdom and are looking for it, and are waiting and laboring to enter into it; but chiefly the poor of this world, rich in faith, whom God has ordained to be heirs of the Kingdom. – 1 Cor. 1:26,27; Jas. 2:5.

The healing of sicknesses by our Lord and his followers at the first advent was a foreshadowing of the blessings which would more fully come when the Kingdom itself would be established; and the miracles served also to draw the attention of the people to the message proclaimed, and to spread abroad the fame of the Teacher, and, incidentally, his message respecting his Kingdom to come, and the repentance necessary to a share therein. This multitude was not merely a local gathering, but one from various quarters, some coming great distances, as people naturally will do in hope of relief from physical disease. Alas, how much more anxious people seem to be to get rid of diseases of the flesh than to be rid of the diseases of the soul – sins: yet of the two the latter is the much worse disease and the more difficult to cure, and in our Lord's preaching these were given first place, as of greater importance, as expressed in the word "Repent;" the physical healing being merely an incidental matter, unworthy to be mentioned in the general proclamation.

We will not dispute as to whether or not the period of miracles is wholly in the past: we will even admit that since we are in the Dawn of the Millennial age a certain beginning of restitution work may be properly due to the world as a part of the divine plan. We urge, however, upon the Lord's people, as a matter of far greater importance than any physical healing, the necessity of bringing their friends and coming themselves to the Great Physician for healing of soul-sickness, – for the opening of their eyes that they may see clearly the "goodness of God as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord;" for the opening of their ears that they may hear fully and clearly the great message of salvation and understand distinctly the terms and conditions of self-sacrifice upon which depends their attainment to the Kingdom glories as members of the "little flock" to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom. Let those who are lame through pride and self-will, and unable to follow in the "narrow way," cast away these crutches, and, coming to the Lord in full submission and contrition and humility, let them learn to walk in his ways of meekness and gentleness, patience and suffering and brotherly-

kindness, that he may exalt them in due time. These sicknesses, these infirmities, these diseases, with which the new nature contends, and the evil spirits of selfishness and pride, and the palsy of fear of man, which bringeth a snare, are diseases far more terrible than earthly sicknesses, and from these, we are sure, the Great Physician is both able and willing, yea anxious, to relieve us.

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