

4:12 *When He heard*- It's as if the Lord took the end of John's public ministry as the cue to begin His ("from that time..." :17). He may have worked this out from the implication of the prophecies about the Elijah prophet. Or it may be that He took John's imprisonment as the sign to go to Galilee. Whatever, He was acting according to information which came to Him, and structuring His ministry accordingly. We get the impression that this was done without direct commandment from the Father but at His initiative.

*Departed*- The Greek definitely implies to withdraw oneself. This seems typical of the Lord during His ministry- to go public for a while and then withdraw.

4:13 *Leaving Nazareth*- Gk. 'to forsake'. Perhaps because of the lack of response already apparent in His home town. Again, as commented on :12, we see the Lord making decisions about His ministry on His initiative in accord with how situations developed.

*Dwelt*- To reside. He changed His base from Nazareth to Capernaum in order to give His message more access to Gentiles.

4:14 *That it might be fulfilled*- This sounds as if the Lord was consciously attempting to fulfil God's word. He was "the word made flesh" but He had to consciously achieve that. See on 3:15.

4:15 *The way*- The idea was that John the Baptist was to prepare "the way" for Messiah. Even at this early stage in the ministry, it seems that the Lord recognized that that "way" was going to have to be amongst the Gentiles.

4:16 *Sat in darkness*- Each of the Gospels is somehow personalized to the writer. Matthew, for example, changes the Lord's quotation of Is. 9:9 from "the people which *walked* in darkness..." to "the people which *sat* in darkness saw great light" (Mt. 4:16), because he was *sitting* at the receipt of custom when the Lord called him (Mt. 9:9).

*Region and shadow of death*- As if death is personified, having its own region and shadow. The darkness of the context in Is. 9:2 is that of Is. 8:22- the darkness of condemnation, for the rejected for whom there was 'no dawn' (Is. 8:20 Heb.). We can be condemned in this life and yet still change that verdict- by coming to the light of Christ. Isaiah 8 concluded by speaking of the wicked being sent into the darkness of condemnation (a common figure in Isaiah, e.g. Is. 5:30; 9:19). Those who dwell in the dark shadow of death are therefore those who have been condemned- but for them, the light of Christ arose from despised Galilee and the area around the Sea of Galilee (Is. 9:1- "the sea" surely refers in the context to the Sea of Galilee, not the Mediterranean).

*Light is sprung up*- The light is clearly the Lord Jesus. He uses the same word soon afterwards in speaking of how God makes His light to 'spring up' upon both the just and the unjust, the evil and the good (Mt. 5:45). These categories are therefore within the group of those to whom the light of the Gospel has been revealed. Likewise the rising of the sun in the parable of the sower (Mt. 13:6 s.w.) would refer to the beginning of Christ's public ministry; the various types of ground initially responded to John's message, but when Christ's ministry was revealed openly, i.e. the sun sprung up, then persecution began, and they fell away.

4:17 *Repent*- The Lord's first public word was the challenge to change. His opening words were surely carefully chosen to verbatim repeat those of John (Mt. 3:2). He wanted to show the continuity of the message from John to Himself. For He was building upon John's work, which had been intended to prepare the way for Him to come triumphantly to Zion over the 'way' which had been prepared in the hearts of repentant people. The exact repetition of John's message could suggest that the Lord saw John's ministry as not having been responded to- and therefore his message and appeal needed repeating.

*At hand*- Gk. 'approaching'. The idea was that John the Baptist had attempted to prepare the way, the highway, over which Messiah would come. So now, Messiah was approaching. "The kingdom of God" was a title for Messiah, seeing that He was the King of the Kingdom; and the term is used like that in Scripture too, e.g. Lk. 17:21. The Kingdom could have been then established, the glory of Yahweh could have come to Zion if John's work of preparing the road for it had been successful. But ultimately, Israel would not. But the Greek can also mean that the Kingdom was being 'made near', it was being drawn near by repentance- which is why the Lord was appealing for repentance. This is a significant theme in Bible teaching- that the exact calendar date of the Kingdom's establishment is dependent upon the repentance of Israel. This repentance appears a prerequisite to the Lord's coming in glory and the establishment of the Kingdom. Our focus should therefore be upon appealing to Israel to repent.

4:18 Lk. 5:5 gives more detail. Despite having toiled all night and caught nothing, Peter was able to subdue his natural wisdom, his sense of futility, and the sense of irritation and superiority which exists in the experienced working man: "Nevertheless (how much that hides!) at *thy word* I will let down the net" (Lk. 5:5). It would seem that the parallel record of this is found in Mt. 4:18, which describes the call of the disciples soon after Christ's triumphant emergence from the wilderness temptations. We learn from Jn. 1:41,42 that it was Peter's brother, Andrew, who first told Peter about Jesus, and who brought him to meet Jesus first of all. The point is that at the time of Peter's call as he was fishing, he had probably heard very few of Christ's words personally. He had heard about Him, and listened to His words for perhaps a few hours at different times in the past. So where did he get this tremendous respect for the word of Christ from, which he demonstrated when Christ called him? The answer must be that he meditated deeply on those words that he had heard and understood, and came to appreciate that the man saying them was worth giving all for. Our far easier access to God's word does not seem to make us more meditative as individuals. We have access to hearing God's word which previous generations never had. We can listen to it on any manner of mobile devices, have recordings of Scripture playing at home, analyse it by computer, hear it sung to us according to our taste in music, read it from pocket Bibles as we work and travel... we *can* and *could* do all these things. My sense is that we just don't make use of our opportunities as we should. Why has God given our generation these special opportunities to be ultra-familiar with His word? Surely it is because our age contains temptations which are simply more powerful than those of former years. So it is *vital*, vital for our eternal destiny, that we do make as much use as possible of all these opportunities. We should be *cramming*, yes cramming, our hearts and brains with the words of God. I

certainly get the feeling that Peter would have listened to a recording of Isaiah on his mobile device if he had one, as he went out fishing; that he'd have had tapes of the Psalms going all evening long in his little fisherman's cottage, wife and kids caught up in his enthusiasm too (Mk. 10:10,15 suggests that the incident with the little children occurred in Peter's house).

*Walking by-* Gk. 'around'. The idea could be that He walked all around the lake.

*Casting-* The Lord's call always comes at the most inconvenient moment. It was whilst Simon and Andrew were in the very act of casting their net into the sea, caught in a freeze-frame of still life, silhouetted against the sea and hills of Galilee, that the Lord calls them to go preaching (Mk. 1:17). The Lord surely intended them to [at least later] figure out His allusion to Jer. 16:14-16, which prophesied that fishermen would be sent out to catch Israel and bring them home to the Father. And He called them to do that, right in the very midst of everyday life.

4:19 *I will make you-* One intention of our calling to the Gospel is to bring others to the Kingdom. Evangelism isn't therefore something intended for only some within the body of Christ.

*Fishers-* The Greek *halieus* is literally 'a salty one', from *hals*, salt. The Lord invites all in Him to see themselves as the salty ones of the earth (Mt. 5:13). The call to be fishers, salty ones, is therefore not only for those men on the shore of Galilee, nor for just some of us- but for us all. The Qumran documents spoke of 'the fishers of men' as being those who would condemn Israel in the last day; and yet the Lord clearly had the idea that they were to 'catch' people out of the 'sea' of the nations and bring them to salvation. So the preachers as 'fishers of men' actually have a double role- as Paul put it, to some our preaching is the savour of death, to others, the savour of life (2 Cor. 2:16). Not only does this encourage us as the preachers to *plead* with men to choose life rather than death; but it is a sober reminder that we too face the impact of the very Gospel which we ourselves preach, and must likewise live lives of ongoing response. We preach, therefore, aimed at a decision- not merely 'witnessing', nor simply imparting helpful information.

4:20 *Left their nets-* The Greek word translated "left" is used throughout the Synoptic records of the disciples 'leaving' what they knew in response to the Gospel. They left their nets, then their boat and even their father (:22). The same word is translated 'to forgive'. Because of our experience of having our sins 'let go' by God and His Son, we are thereby motivated to 'let go' not only others' sins and debts to us, but all the ties that bind us to the things of this life.

4:21 *Mending their nets-* They were intending to continue fishing. There was therefore no theatricism attached to their dramatic leaving of all.

4:22 *Followed Him-* They became His disciples, that is the meaning of the idiom. The way the Lord called people in the midst of their daily lives, and they immediately "left all and followed Him" is surely recorded to set a pattern for all future response to Him (Mt. 4:22; Mk. 1:18). Those fishermen who left their nets had heard the message some time earlier, but the record is framed so as to stress the immediacy and totality of response to Him, in the

midst of daily life. In a day when the complexity of modern living can become an excuse to justify almost anything as an expression of discipleship, we need to remember the starker simplicities of Jesus' first call: "Follow me". And the immediate response which was made to it. In this sense, Jesus through His word that makes Him flesh to us, i.e. an imaginable person...still walks up to fishermen, into shops, accountants' offices, school classrooms: and bids us urgently and immediately leave behind our worldly advantage, and follow Him in the way of true discipleship. The immediacy of response is quite a theme (:20, and especially in Mark's early chapters). It continues with the speed at which people were baptized in the Acts.

4:23 *Went about... teaching... preaching... healing-* The preaching of the apostles (and of ourselves) continues the personal work of the Lord in whom they lived and moved, and therefore often Acts records the preaching work in language lifted from Luke as well as the other Gospel records (e.g. Acts 4:2; 5:12-16 = Mt. 4:23).

*The Gospel of the Kingdom-* The preaching of the Kingdom is made parallel to preaching the time of acceptance with God and forgiveness of sins *now* (Lk. 4:43 cp. 19, 2 Cor. 6:2); Rom. 14:17, which seems to teach that the Kingdom of God is more about "peace and joy in the Holy Spirit", both now and eternally, than physical, tangible things. Christ's parables about the Kingdom don't speak of a political Kingdom, but rather about the relationship between God and the believer in the here and now.

4:24 *They brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, and those which were lunatic, and paralytics; and He healed them-* The repetition of the word "and..." gives the impression that every kind of illness – physical and mental, understood and not understood – was healed by the Lord Jesus. "Lunatic" translates the Greek *selēniāzomai* – "to be moon struck", derived from the noun *selēnē*, the moon. It's not true that some mental illnesses come from being moon-struck. But the idea is used, without correction – just as the idea of 'demon possession' is in the preceding phrase. "Brought" translates a word which was used in the technical sense of bringing sacrifice- and the idea of converts as sacrifices is repeated in Rom. 15:16.

4:25 *Great multitudes-* Luke makes the point that His popularity was not only because of the miracles, but because of His teaching. Lk. 4:22 records how people were amazed at the gracious words He spoke; there was something very unusual in His manner of speaking. Because of the gracious words and manner of speaking of Jesus, therefore God so highly exalted Him (Ps. 45:2). The Father was *so* impressed with the words of His Son. Evidently there must have been something totally outstanding about His use of language. God highly exalted Him because He so loved righteousness and hated wickedness (Ps. 45:7), and yet also because of His manner of speaking (Ps. 45:2); so this *love* of righteousness and hatred of evil was what made His words so special.

## Notes

(1) See Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2012) p. 83.