

Dear Heavenly Father,

Praise

When Jesus settled in Capernaum, he fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy: "In the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness on them has light shone" (Isa 9:1–2). I praise you today for sending Jesus, the radiance of your glory and the exact imprint of your nature, to be a shining light in my life! All glory and honor and power be the Son of God! Hallelujah!

Today in Your Word

Today you told me about the beginning of Jesus' preaching ministry in Galilee. From the start, Jesus challenged the people's assumptions about your kingdom. He said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). This was exciting to the Jews, for the words "kingdom of God" invoked the Messianic kingdom spoken of by the prophets (cf. Dan 2, 7). Yet it was also troubling because the words "repent and believe" seemed out of place. The Jews were the descendants of Abraham; surely their inclusion in the kingdom was certain. Why did they need to repent? Jesus explained to them, as he did to Nicodemus, that the kingdom is first and foremost a spiritual kingdom in which the Messiah rules in the hearts of those who believe him and accept him as Lord. Only those who were born of the Spirit, as Ezekiel prophesied, would enter the kingdom and be a part of its establishment on earth in the last days (Ezek 11:17–20). The earthly kingdom was coming, and it would indeed be a worldwide kingdom of peace, but it was "at hand" in the sense that the Messiah had come to suffer and bear the sins of many (Isa 53:3–6). This must be done first, for Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would pour "out his soul to death" *before* Jerusalem would sing for joy over her children (Isa 53:12; 54:1). I marvel at the elegance and simplicity of Jesus' gospel. He captured the people's attention and convicted their hearts at the same time! Jesus' scripture reading in Nazareth revealed that he recognized the difference between "the year of the LORD's favor" and "the day of vengeance of our God" (Isa 61:2). The former referred to the first coming of the Messiah, while the later referred to the second coming. Jesus' friends and relatives realized that he was claiming to be the Messiah, but they couldn't understand how this could be. After all, Jesus had grown up with them, and he had never done anything to suggest that he was the Messiah. Jesus knew they wanted to see him do a miracle, but he also knew that their desire came from unbelief. He compared them to one of the most apostate periods in Israel's history and suggested that the Gentiles, who were shunned and disliked by the Jews, were more worthy of ministry than they were. No wonder they were filled with rage! This shows me how easy it is to go through the motions of religious service and yet have no relationship with you. May this never be true of me!

Reflection

When Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John, they immediately left everything and followed him. Have I forsaken everything that would keep me from following Jesus?

Request

Father, my desire is to be a disciple of your Son, Jesus Christ. Help me to obey his voice in all things.

Thanksgiving

Thank you for teaching me to be a fisher of men (Matt 4:19). I want to catch all I can for you!

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Suggested Hymn: "Hail to the Lord's Anointed" – James Montgomery.

Meditation Verse: Luke 4:21.