



# **THE NEW SHOFAR**

**God is present in history - in our lives**

**We see it in unexpected acts of love, justice and peace**

**January 26<sup>th</sup>**

## ***Galilee is a strange place for the messiah to be working!***

Nowhere in Jewish literature was there any suggestion that the Messiah would be working in Galilee. Not only was it a long way from Jerusalem, it was also considered to have a lax approach to the Law. They were thus not pure enough for their Jerusalem cousins. Add on top of that the political situation, in which the Galileans play an active role. It was a place festering with revolutionary attitudes and Zealots. Just prior to the birth of Jesus there was an uprising that was put down ferociously by the Romans, but it left the area with a less than flattering reputation.

## ***Jesus fulfills the Scriptures***

Matthew presents Jesus as fulfilling the prophesy of Isaiah and giving it his own twist. What Isaiah said was that the area of Galilee was the *first* to fall into the hands of the foreign invaders (733 B.C.). They will also be the *first* to be released from captivity (583 B.C.). For Matthew this first to be released reference points to Jesus. He set out for Galilee first, as it had been prophesied.

Galilee in particular raised massive difficulties for the preaching of the Kingdom. It was the place where Judaism came into contact with paganism and the clash between the two was constant and ongoing. Jesus the Jew chose to live among those people Judaism would consider to be living on the fringes of society, a risky and unclean people who did not fit into what was thought to be the model of a true Jewish follower of Yahweh the God of Israel. Galilee was not a suitable place for God!

## ***To the people who sit in darkness***

In our text from Isaiah the prophet refers to a people who walk in darkness. Jesus tweaks this to read *a people who sit in darkness*. What is the difference between these? Clearly, for Jesus, the people “out there” find the spiritual darkness so encompassing they are not able to move around. They are lost. The Greek verb (according to one commentator) has the sense of being in a “sluggish solitude”. It is a bit like the darkness covering the earth at the time of creation. Nothing can advance, no life can flower until that darkness is broken and light given a chance to shine. This *sitting* is mentioned twice in verse 16 and is meant to apply to the pagans as well as to the Jerusalem Jews.

People live in a state of paralysis until Jesus the Messiah comes to them. They are sitting there surrounded by darkness, unable to move. Jesus brings the *light* to a world living in shadows.

## ***From then on...***

This is an important phrase and it seems as though Matthew means it to be applied to the next few chapters (The sermon on the Mount). In fact, the next two narratives are all a part of the Evangelist preparing for what is to come in that Sermon (the call to repentance and the call of the Disciples).

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Thus, when Jesus talks of repentance it is the Sermon that outlines what a true and genuine turning around of a disciples' life must entail. As He says, the Kingdom of God is upon them and without *repentance* they have no hope of finding a way out of darkness. Without biblical repentance they will not know they need Christ the Messiah and so will not find Christ the Messiah calling to them.

***From that time Jesus began to proclaim..***

The key word here is the verb *to proclaim*. It is the Greek source of our English word *kerygma* and it means to preach or proclaim with authority, as a herald of the one sending them. It is often associated with a work coming from the king and so becomes a royal proclamation. Heralds do not *proclaim* their own words or versions of the teachings of Christ. They *proclaim* the only word having authority: the word of the Gospel.

Note that what Jesus does is repeat the proclamation of John his predecessor. He seems to find the message of the Baptist acceptable, in line with his own mission from God. It is important for Jesus to make it clear he is not an innovator. When he does begin preaching in his own original message, it is in a way that does not dismiss earlier traditions. He builds on and uses the same sources – what God has done in history to bring salvation to all the world.

***For goodness sake, turn your lives around before it is too late!***

“Repentance” means an about turn of one’s life under God. The Hebrew source for this word requires a significant transformation in the way our lives are heading, turning from present preoccupations and priorities to ones that are to be revealed in the Sermon on the Mount. What drives this repentance is the immanence of the divine intervention in our lives. Without some kind of “change” we risk not allowing God’s revelation and grace into our existence and ways of living.

In this we are enabled by the very Word we are to preach and live. We will see this in the next story, the call of the fishermen. It was the Word of God they heard preached by Jesus that enabled them to do what we might feel to be the unthinkable. They leave everything – literally. How is that possible? It happens because the Word of God has its own power. It is not simply something we hear or read. It cuts through the plaque in our lives ...**Hebrews 4:12**... *Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

The command of Jesus to *repent – turn around* – is filled with grace, the grace we need to transform our lives and the wisdom we need to understand our sins, failings and need of God at the centre of our being. Thus, *repentance* is a **gift** from God. When we take seriously this process of repentance (discerning those things **from which** we need to turn and the kind of existence **towards which** we need to direct our lives – Sermon on the Mount) we are able to proceed because the pains, difficulties, fears and weaknesses are dealt with by the God who is at our side throughout. It is not about writing down our sins and failures, our strengths and weaknesses. It is more about discerning priorities, understanding the direction towards which our life is heading. The way to measure true repentance is to use the Sermon on the Mount – (chapters 5,6,7) as our measuring rod.

***Why bother? I am doing alright at the moment.***

The answer for Matthew is clear: *because the reign of God* is what now defines the world. With the coming of Christ reality must now be understood in terms of Jesus and the teachings of the Gospel. This is what we preach by word and by example. No innovations. Just the Word of God in Christ.

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