

The Stranger of Galilee

This morning we will be meditating upon the Lord Jesus. And I suppose that is not too surprising because He said, **"In the volume of the book it is written of Me."**

And, for a few moments, we will be considering the life of a lady who served the Lord with the talents He had entrusted to her. As a young girl, she was afflicted with poor eyesight that continued to deteriorate, and, for the last 20 years, left her totally blind. Nevertheless, as her physical eyesight decreased, her spiritual eyesight grew brighter, and she was enabled to write . . . how many? . . . 541 hymns. We have just sung one of her hymns, "Nearer, Still Nearer."

You may not have noticed her name, but in a few moments, you will find out who she was.

But, before we do, let's ask the Lord to bless this time in His word in prayer:

Heavenly Father, we do thank You for the privilege of being here this morning, of assembling to the name of the Lord Jesus. We thank you, Heavenly Father, that we have the Holy Spirit to guide us and direct us, and to speak to each one of our individual needs. We ask You to bless this time together, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

In fancy I stood by the shore, one day, of the beautiful murm'ring sea; I saw the great crowds as they thronged the way of the Stranger of Galilee.

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The Stranger of Galilee? Does the Bible call Jesus "the Stranger of Galilee"? Well, no, it doesn't. Scripture refers to Jesus by many names. He is the Light of the world, the Good Shepherd, the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star . . . but not *the Stranger of Galilee*.

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But this morning I would like to look at Jesus through the eyes of the hymn writer, Lelia Morris, who saw Jesus as **the Stranger of Galilee**.

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Unlike the mighty nation that existed under Solomon's reign, Jesus walked the dusty roads of a country that was sorely divided . . . both spiritually, morally,

and geographically. So, let's begin by looking at the three provinces that made up the land of Israel.

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Judea, the most *southerly* province, was the home of a very orthodox Jewish population. And when you consider the fact that Jerusalem, the city of David, and the temple—the centre of Jewish worship—was there, such orthodoxy was not surprising.

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Moving up the map, we come to **Samaria**. To make a long story short, the Samaritans were a mixture of many nations and religions. This unfortunate situation (occurring in a land that had been given to Israel) was the result of an Assyrian

invasion. You see, it was the common practice of an invading army to remove most of the original inhabitants and repopulate the area with captives from other conquered nations. This practice created a people who were divided amongst themselves and easily controlled. However, the infusion of idol-worshipping Gentiles into God's Promised Land was not a good idea. We can read about this problem and the so-called *remedy* in 2 Kings 17:25-27.

**"And it was so, at the beginning of their dwelling there (that is, the Gentiles), that they did not fear the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them. So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, "The nations whom you have removed and placed**

in the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the God of the land; therefore He has sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land." Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, "Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land."

But the king's solution only made things worse. In addition to the intermixing and intermarriage of Jews and Gentiles that had produced a half-breed nation, we now have a sort of quasi-religion that served pagan gods while maintaining a veneer of Jewish religious practices.

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Northern Israel contained the province of **Galilee**. Its population was about half Jewish and half Gentile. Again, part of that situation was the result of the Assyrian invasion. The Assyrians had removed many of the original Jewish inhabitants and replaced them with Gentiles. And even before the Assyrian invasion, there had been an influx of Gentiles. How this happened is described in 1 Kings 9:10-11.

"Now it happened at the end of twenty years, when Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the LORD and the king's house (Hiram the king of Tyre had supplied Solomon with cedar and cypress and gold, as much as he desired), that King Solomon then gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee."

There are some differences of opinion concerning the Galileans, but it appears that, unlike the Samaritans, the Jews living there did not compromise their Jewish heritage by intermarriage. However, their pagan neighbours did have a negative effect upon them, and they were not as Orthodox in their religion as the Judeans.

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To make a long story short, the Orthodox Jews in Judea had no dealings with the Samaritans and looked down their noses at their Jewish neighbours in northern Israel.

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So, that is a quick look at all three provinces. However, since the Messiah had

only been sent ". . . **to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,**" we will only consider the Jewish provinces of Galilee and Judea in this meditation.

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Let's begin by asking the question, *In what way did the Judeans look down their nose at their Galilean brethren?*

Well, for one thing, they held to the unsubstantiated belief that God hadn't favoured the Galileans with any outstanding spiritual leaders. For example, when Nicodemus tried to defend Jesus, his fellow Pharisees retorted, ". . . **Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.**" The obvious conclusion was—since Jesus had come from Galilee—He

couldn't be a person of any importance. But they were wrong in both instances. The prophets Micah and Elijah and Jonah were *Galileans*.

And, of course, they were wrong about Jesus' birthplace. Although He had been brought up in Galilee, His birthplace was in Bethlehem, Judea.

And there is another interesting point that I should mention. A Galilean was easily identified by his accent. When Peter tried to deny any connection to Jesus, his Galilean accent gave him away.

Mark 14:70 **"And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, "Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it."** And this would be true of Jesus Who would have the

same accent as His Galilean parents. I can just imagine some of the religious leaders in Jerusalem looking down their noses at Jesus because of His accent.

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And, in addition to this negative thinking that every Galilean must endure, Jesus had another whole set of biases levelled at Him. For instance, because of His virgin birth, which most people wouldn't believe, He was suspected of being an illegitimate child. That bias surfaced during a heated discussion with the religious leaders when they retorted, **"We were not born of fornication; we have one Father--God."**

And then, considering the fact that Jesus must present Himself as their Messiah and

the Son of God, being a *carpenter* from Nazareth would not be too helpful.

But, on the other hand, His mighty works—the undeniable credentials that God had given Him—should have been enough to convince everyone. Just look at Matthew 4:23-24, which tells us that “. . . **Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them.**”

How could the religious leaders deal with such indisputable evidence? Well, they

simply *lied* to the people, telling them that . . . **"This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."**

Certainly, those kinds of biases would have defeated anyone else . . . but not Jesus. His only priority was obeying His Heavenly Father. And one of His many responsibilities was the fulfilment of prophecy.

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So, let's look at the subject of **prophecy** as it concerns Galilee.

Many years ago, when the invading armies of Assyria poured into Israel, they came from the north. This meant that the Jews living in Galilee were the first to suffer, and no doubt very severely.

Certainly, this invasion was a result of God's judgment on Israel's sin. However, along with His judgment, there was mercy. We can read about it in Isaiah 9:1-2:

**"Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, As when at first He (that is God) lightly esteemed The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, And afterward more heavily oppressed her, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, In Galilee of the Gentiles. (And now, we have God's mercy.) *The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined.*"**

And that **light** would come to them in the form of God's Messiah . . . Who would begin His earthly ministry in **Galilee**.

However, before Jesus could begin His public ministry, there must be a time of *preparation*. And even before that could begin, Israel must be prepared for their Messiah. That was the job of John the Baptist.

Matthew 3:1 **"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

John's message had spread like wildfire, arousing the nation from Jerusalem to the remotest hill towns and fishing villages in Galilee. And most certainly, it would have been the topic of discussion in Joseph's carpenter shop where Jesus was carrying on the family business. Of course, Jesus was fully aware of John's

message, including the major part He was to play.

And so, packing up a few things and saying goodbye to His mother and the rest of the family, He traded His warm bed and a flourishing business for the open road.

He would make His way to the Jordan to be baptized by His cousin John, whom, no doubt, He hadn't seen in years.

Beginning to read in Luke 3:21 **"When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased." Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about**

**thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph."**

Certainly, by taking His place with His national brethren, Jesus would be setting a good example. But there was something about Jesus' baptism that was a little unusual. John was calling upon the people to . . . **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,"** and Jesus had nothing to repent of. And even before John saw the sign of a dove that positively identified his cousin as . . . **"the Son of God,"** he instinctively recognized Jesus as his superior: **"I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"**

And he was right. There *was* something else going on here, and it is revealed in that last sentence: **"Now Jesus Himself began**

**His ministry at about thirty years of age."**

You might say, this was Jesus' *commissioning service* . . . complete with God's acknowledgement of His dear Son. Remember what He said . . . **"You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."**

And it is instructive to note that the sons of Levi also began their priestly ministry at the age of 30.

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And so, Jesus was on His way. And what would be the first order of business?

Mark's gospel tells us . . . **"immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan."**

Obviously, the Holy Spirit considered this next step to be of great importance. You see, not only was Jesus the Son of God, but He was the Son of man. As such, He was the possessor of a human body. Certainly, His incarnation was necessary. *Only a man could die for man's sins.* But, considering the pathway He must travel, it would be essential that Jesus' body be kept in complete subjection to God's will. No amount of physical suffering must be allowed to alter Jesus' decisions. And, in my opinion, this time of testing in the wilderness gave Jesus an opportunity to develop a physical endurance that would stand Him in good stead in the future.

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No sooner had Jesus returned from His temptations in the wilderness than He began to collect His disciples.

Matthew 4:18-25 **"And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him."**

Jesus also recruited Philip and Nathaniel who were from the same Galilean city as Peter and Andrew.

Are we noticing something here? Yes, up to this point, Jesus has chosen all His disciples from Galilee. And, although I cannot prove it, some commentators tell us that all of Jesus' disciples, except Judas, were Galileans, or at least were *residents* of Galilee.

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And so, having had this brief look into Jesus' preparations, let's return to the commencement of His public ministry.

Matthew 4:23 **"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all**

kinds of disease among the people. Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. Great multitudes followed Him--from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan."

This might be a good time to point out some differences between John's ministry and Jesus' ministry. Certainly, their message was the same: "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**" But their *location* was different. John preached in the *wilderness of Judea* while Jesus taught the people in the *synagogues of Galilee*.

And there is another important difference. Certainly, John preached a powerful *message*, but that's all. On the other hand, not only did Jesus *teach* the people, but He performed many *miracles*. And when Jesus sent His disciples forth as ambassadors of the kingdom, He gave them this *additional* responsibility:

Matthew 10:7-8 **"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give."**

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And, while Jesus was busy spreading the good news of the kingdom, Satan was also busy trying to *extinguish* that light.

His first step was to put an end to John's ministry. To do this, he employed the weakness of king Herod and the wickedness of Herodias to imprison John and eventually to have him beheaded.

Matthew 4:12-17 **"Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet."**

Yes, in fulfilment of Isaiah 9:1-2, Jesus would begin His public ministry *in Galilee* and take up residence in the Galilean city of *Capernaum*.

And His preference for Galilee would be evident throughout Jesus' earthly

ministry. For instance, He would do more miracles in Galilee than in Judea. As an example of some of those many miracles, there was the healing of a man with an unclean spirit in the synagogue in Capernaum. The astonished crowd exclaimed . . . **"What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee."**

And then there was the nobleman from Cana of Galilee whose son was sick unto death. Jesus simply said, **"Your son lives,"** and he was healed.

Then there was the lady who had a flow of blood for 12 long years. She touched the

border of His garment and was healed immediately.

And there were many more miracles that I have not mentioned.

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However, before we go on to other things, I would like to spend some time talking about Jesus' miraculous feeding of 5000 men, besides women and children, with a little boy's lunch. That miracle was also done in Galilee. It had been a very long day, and Mark 6:31 tells us ". . . **there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.**" Jesus knew His disciples could not take much more of this, and so ". . . **they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves.**" But verse 33 tells us ". . .

the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him."

By this time, I think I would have lost my patience, but not Jesus. Verse 34 tells us **". . . He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things."**

And not only did Jesus *teach* them many things, but Matthew 14:14 tells us, He **". . . healed their sick."**

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I'm sure our time would be well spent in considering every aspect of the feeding of the 5000 and the miracle of Jesus

walking on the water. However, since our time is limited, and I'm sure you are familiar with the story, let's skip ahead to the *next day*.

By this time, Jesus and His disciples were on the other shore and were in Capernaum. As for that rather demanding crowd who had tried to ". . . **take Him by force to make Him king,**" they were still on the other shore and wondering where Jesus had gone.

John 6:24 ". . . **when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.**"

But why Capernaum? Was it just a guess? Probably not. As we know, Capernaum—not Jerusalem—was Jesus' city of choice.

Verse 25 **"And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You come here?"** Jesus ignored their question and got right to the point:

Verse 26 **"Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled."** And that was the crux of the matter, wasn't it?

Their attraction was the free food, not the spiritual benefit Jesus could provide. And if we would read on, we would discover that Jesus repeatedly tried to turn their thinking in the right direction.

They talked about Moses' provision of manna—and hinted that Jesus should do the same.

But Jesus replied. . . **"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."** And so it went.

The more Jesus tried to redirect their thinking to spiritual things and to Himself as the real source of life, the more they resisted.

And finally, in John 6:66, we read those sad words . . . **"From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more."** It was a turning point.

Certainly, there were Galileans who would continue to follow their Shepherd, but for many of them, that was it. They had walked away—and they were not coming back.

John 6:67 **"Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"** I can almost hear the sadness in His voice. **"But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. "Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** No doubt Peter was speaking on the behalf of all the disciples, and I am sure Jesus was greatly encouraged.

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As we have just seen, the Galileans could get a little out of hand. But, compared to Judea, the Galileans were not nearly as hostile in their treatment of Jesus. In fact, I can only think of two occasions when Jesus' life was threatened in Galilee. Of all places, one of these

instances occurred in His hometown of Nazareth. The residents were prepared to accept Him as a *prophet*, but when He alluded to the fact that He was their *Messiah*, they tried to throw Him over a cliff!

The second occasion occurred in the synagogue in Capernaum. There was a man there with a withered hand, and Jesus healed him on the Sabbath. And what was the reaction to this marvellous miracle? Mark 3:6 tells us ". . . **the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.**"

By comparison, scripture records six occasions when Jesus' life was threatened in Judea. You see, there were a couple of things that the religious leaders would

not tolerate—and Jesus was guilty of *both*. He had healed at least two men on the Sabbath—and He claimed to be *equal with God*.

And one time, He told them that the kingdom would be taken from them and given to another nation. And what was their reaction? Sometimes they took up stones and would have executed Him on the spot, and at other times, they made plans to have Him arrested.

In every case, a loving Father made sure they were *unsuccessful*. But when the *right* time had come, God withdrew His hand of protection . . . and Jesus' enemies were allowed to accomplish their evil desires.

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Of course, Jesus had friends in Judea. There was Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. There was Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea who lovingly prepared Jesus' body for burial. And there were others who were prepared to suffer reproach for His sake.

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As we draw this meditation to a close, I would like to point out His faithful disciples who had sacrificed all to follow Jesus.

And to tie it all together, I would like to draw your attention to different phrases from John 12:26 **"If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor."**

Let's consider the first part of this verse:

"If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me."

The disciples had no illusions about the dangers involved in *following* Jesus. When He sent them forth as ambassadors of the kingdom and told them . . . **"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves,"** they remained undeterred by the danger. At the time of Lazarus' death, when Jesus said . . . **"Let us go to Judea again,"** The disciples said to Him, **"Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?"** But when they perceived that Jesus was going to go ". . . **Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."**

And not only did they go *with Him* to

Bethany, which was only about two miles

from Jerusalem, but they held their last Passover with Jesus in the very midst of that dangerous city.

And we all know the trauma they endured after Jesus' crucifixion as they met behind closed doors for fear of the Jews.

Continuing to read John 12:26 ". . . **and where I am, there My servant will be also.**" After Jesus' death and resurrection, and as He was about to return to the right hand of His Father, who was it that was still in Jerusalem?

Acts 1:10-11 "**While they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into**

heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

Did you get that? Yes, it was the "**Men of Galilee**"—His faithful disciples—who could have gone back to their homes in Galilee and been safe . . . but had braved the dangers of Jerusalem to *be with Jesus*.

And finally, we read ". . . **If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.**"

I'm sure the Heavenly Father has honoured the disciples in many ways. And if we look at Revelation 21:14, we can read about one of these ways. "**Now the wall of the city** (that is the New Jerusalem) **had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.**"

Yes, some of them were just fishermen . . .
but now their names are engraved in
heaven by the hand of a *rewarding* God.

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In one sense, this meditation has been about  
*choices*, hasn't it? Some Galileans  
continued to follow Jesus through thick  
and thin, while . . . **"many of His  
disciples went back and walked with Him  
no more."**

And it was the same in Judea. **"Some said,  
"He is good"; others said, "No, on the  
contrary, He deceives the people."**

So, what will you do with Jesus? It's a  
choice we all must make. God has done His  
part, hasn't He?

John 3:16 says, **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."**

Now it's our turn . . . and our decision will determine our eternal destiny.

Yes, **"He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."**

And so, if you have not already trusted Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, I pray that you will forsake **". . . the sin which so easily ensnares us"** and accept His salvation today.

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Let's just close in prayer:

*Heavenly Father, we have had a few moments to look into the life of the Lord Jesus . . . as He came to this earth, as He suffered the reproach of men, as He died upon the cross, and as He ascended to heaven . . . all for our sake. And He has encouraged us in scripture that . . .*  
**"now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation". Amen.**

And that is true today. As we are here in Heidelberg Fellowship, some of us might not have trusted the Lord. Today, while you're still here, you can accept the Lord, and it says **"He that has the Son hath life"**. . . right now, *has* life. And so, I encourage you to speak to the elders, and there are others, or myself—we have all accepted the Lord Jesus and

we know about His love and His acceptance.

As we meditate upon these things, I have called on Luc again to sing "The Stranger of Galilee."

