

FOR THE SABBATH SCHOOL

International S. S. Lesson.

LESSON III.—BEGINNING OF THE MINISTRY OF JESUS.—JAN. 16.
(Matt. iv : 17-25)

GOLDEN TEXT.—“The people which sat in darkness saw a great light.”—Matt. iv. 16.

TIME AND PLACE.—Summer, A. D., 28 Galilee.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I Beginning to preach, 17 II. Beginning to call men, 18-22 III. Beginning to heal, 23-25.

INTRODUCTION.—More than a year intervened between the time of the last lesson and the present. Of this interval Matthew gives us no record, but from the other Gospels we learn that after His temptation Jesus returned to Jordan, where He was recognized by John as the Messiah, and gathered around Him His earliest followers. (John i. 29-51.) Accompanied by them, He went to Cana, in Galilee, where His first miracle was wrought. (John ii. 1-11.) After a brief time in Galilee our Lord returned to Jerusalem, where He cleansed the temple of its traders (John ii, 12-25), and where He instructed Nicodemus. Nearly a year was spent in Judea, when the imprisonment of John the Baptist and the opposition of the Jewish rulers led him to go again into Galilee, passing through Samaria, and pausing at Jacob's well and the neighboring village, at length making His headquarters at Capernaum. Our lesson takes up His work at this point.

VERSE BY VERSE.—17. “From that time.”—From the time of His going into Galilee. “Began to preach.”—He had, no doubt, taught in Judea, but His ministry from this time became a more public ministry. “The kingdom of heaven.”—The spiritual kingdom which Jesus was about to establish, so called because its source is in heaven, and it leads to heaven.

18. “Saw two brethren.”—He had seen them a year before, and announced then that He was the Messiah, and they had been for a time His followers. (See John i. 35-42.)

19. “Fishers of men.”—Whose work should be to win men and gather them into the kingdom of Christ.

20. “Straightway.”—At once. “Followed him.”—Became from this time His constant companions.

21. “Two brethren, James, . . . John.”—They were cousins of Jesus. Zebedee's wife, Salome, was the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. (John xix. 25.)

23. “All Galilee.”—The northern province of Palestine. “Synagogues.”—Places of worship, like our churches.

24. “All Syria.”—A region north and northeast of Palestine, of indefinite extent. “Torments.”—Painful diseases.

25. “Decapolis.”—Literally, *ten cities*, the country east and south-east of the Sea of Galilee. “Beyond Jordan.”—The country east of and bordering on the river Jordan.

THE POINTS. Follow me. Jesus never calls a soul to perform an impossibility. He never calls any to a life of idleness. He went about. He preached. He taught. He attended to the needs of the suffering. Those whom He called were already busy. God often repeats his call, inviting to a greater work and larger territory. He that is faithful in little is likely to be faithful over much. They were fishermen. They were also disciples. Jesus made no objection to their occupation. He endorsed it. He promised them the work of fishing with Him. He calls builders, and calls them to build up a spiritual house for him. He calls shepherds, and says, “Feed my flock.” He sets every one into the place for which they are fitted. But the invitation, the call, was to follow. They were not called upon to go into places too hard or too obscure for His own notice. They were to go in company with Him. No duty too hard, no place too dreary for a disciple who walks and talks with the Master. The call was “(1) an invitation to full communion with Him, (2) a demand of perfect self-renunciation for His sake, (3) an announcement of a new sphere of activity under Him, (4) a promise of rich reward from Him.” This call was also “(1) a call to faith; (2) a call to labor; (3) a call to suffering and cross-bearing; (4) a call to a heavenly home.”

The response. Prompt and willing. Straightway and immediately they left their nets. They were not waiting for an opening which might lead them into some more desirable work. They were busy after a night's labor getting ready for another effort in the sea. They were satisfied with their calling. They were congenial with their partners. They were not expecting Jesus to call for them in His work. They had been with Him before, and He had made no special demand on them. But now they make no question of why, or when, or where, but regard the call, the invitation, the demand, as sincere, and Him who made it as their rightful Master. Therefore they act promptly. As disciples they were ready for anything for the cause they had so lately espoused, and therefore went willingly. No counsel from others

was necessary. They know the Master. They trusted He would lead them safely and care for all their interests. Therefore they had no need to prepare, but went straightway and immediately. An example of always being ready is here illustrated.

The work. Teaching, preaching, healing, with authority. “His authority was that of one who knows all the facts and all their bearings. Being God He knew all about heaven and hell, all about God and the truths He had revealed to the Jews, and all His plans and purposes for His kingdom in the future. His message was the good news of God's fatherly love and care, of His forgiveness of sin, of knowledge of the way of life, of the power of the Holy Spirit, of new light breaking over all the earth, and not for the Jews alone. Every doctrine and promise and hope of the Gospel was good news.”—P. Jesus was an example in preaching and teaching, which He would have His disciples, whom He calls to that work, imitate. “It is sad when teaching ceases to be preaching; more sad when preaching ceases to be teaching; most sad when preaching ceases to be the Gospel of the kingdom; not less sad when destitute of the power of life.”

The territory. Distant cities heard of the fame of Jesus. His work was so practical, so helpful, that communities were bettered physically as well as spiritually wherever Jesus went. Remote places, distant from the holy city where the temple and the priests were the attractions for the Jews, heard the good news of the kingdom. Among the lowly and the sick Jesus began His ministry, and there His words were received.

CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR.

DAILY READINGS.

First Day—The First Disciples of Jesus. John i. 35-51.

Second Day—The First Miracle of Jesus. John ii. 1-12.

Third Day—Beginning of Jesus' Ministry in Judea. John ii. 13; iii. 24.

Fourth Day—Jesus Journeying from Judea to Galilee. John iv. 1-42.

Fifth Day—The Second Miracle of Jesus. John iv. 43-54.

Sixth Day—Close of Jesus' Ministry in Judea. John v. 1-47.

PRAYER MEETING TOPIC, JAN. 16.—FISHERS OF MEN: HOW TO WIN SOULS. 2 Tim. iv. 1 S.

TOPIC THOUGHTS.

To win men we must serve men. There is nothing so attractive as unselfishness.

Study of the Master Soul-winner teaches us the secret of His proficiency.

We cannot win souls unless we truly want to do so.

There never yet has been a soul converted without the help of the Spirit.

The trained hand can best throw the life line. To save souls we must study how.

A passion for souls may be acquired in the school of prayer.

Without the presentation of Christ and Him crucified there can be no salvation for sinners.

The worldly are not winsome for Christ.

The soul-winner must spend much time in study of the word of God. In its pages is found essential wisdom.

For the same reason that Christ died, His disciples should live — to save men. The greatest men of the world have had this passion, although not all of them saw Christ's day. The object of their life was to bring to men salvation so far as they knew it—social salvation, industrial salvation, or intellectual salvation. It is our greater privilege to offer to men full salvation for this life and the life to come. Dare we do less than accept this as the mission of our life?

The summons of to-day is a summons for young men and women who will convert desks, anvils, plows, counters, machines and kitchens, into pulpits for the preaching of the glorious gospel of the Son of God. Every post of duty should be a pulpit. Just where you are is the place where God wants you to be a soul-winner, and it is the place where you can serve Him most effectively. The fish that you are to catch are the fish in the waters beside which you stand. If you cannot catch them you would cast your line in vain in the waters of Africa or India or China.

As we become fishers of men, we must rightly apprehend the true means of salvation. Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life,” and “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Matt. i. 21; Acts iv. 12, v. 31, x. 43, xiii. 23-24, 38. 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6. Men are not saved by self-reformation, or by merit. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” The scriptures are very clear on this point. (Acts xv. 11, Rom. iii. 20-26, iv. 16, 25; Eph. ii. 5, 8. 2 Tim. i. 9, 10. Tit. iii. 5, 6, etc.)