

# Where Christ preached

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*Jesus' three-year public ministry can be divided into approximately three phases. The Lord preached in all the towns of Israel, often more than once, and taught in numerous places and situations, wherever people would listen.*

**B**EFORE JESUS began his public ministry he preached to his family for about thirty years (Lk. 3:23) in the best way possible: by his example. Although his family rejected his teachings during his ministry, they accepted them after his resurrection and became members of the Jerusalem ecclesia (Acts 1:14). The Lord's public ministry of about three years can be divided approximately into the following phases:

- 1 The Judean ministry
- 2 The Galilean ministry
- 3 The Perea ministry.

A look at a map will show that Jesus really did go to the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' and gave them opportunity to follow him, the One sent by God for their redemption. In order to appreciate where our Lord did his preaching, it is proposed to look at the three phases in turn.

## **The Judean ministry**

The Judean ministry is covered in the Gospels in the records of his baptism and temptation, and in John chapters 1–5. However, it is in Bethsaida of Galilee that we first see Jesus preaching to Bartholomew (Nathanael); and then at the wedding in Cana, where the first miracle-sign was performed, as a result of which "his disciples believed on him" (2:11).

Here we see a major difference between our preaching and Christ's. He was given the Spirit without measure to perform wonders that supported his teaching in a way that ours can never be on this side of the Kingdom. But let us follow the Lord's example and be a witness and example for him at the next wedding we attend! Isaiah, in his prophecy of the Lord and his forerunner, speaks of the one who tells good tidings to Zion as lifting up his voice to "the cities of Judah", telling them, "Behold your God" (40:9), and John 3:22 may be a fulfilment of this. Nicodemus the Pharisee came to Jesus by night for a one-to-one discussion of Christ's teaching, and it is often in that situation

we can preach to friends, neighbours and work-colleagues most effectively.

Going through Samaria and resting, because of his weariness with the journey, by Jacob's Well, the Lord was brought face to face with the exuberant woman of Samaria. What fruit

that conversation produced (4:28-30)! And it was unplanned, out-of-doors and quite spontaneous. Are we able to bring the conversation around to the Truth in our chance encounters, as Jesus did? Some people are, and it is a great gift that can be used, as Jesus showed, to the glory of God (v. 42). Two further miracle-signs, the nobleman's son healed in Cana of Galilee and the paralysed man healed by the Bethesda Pool in Jerusalem, bring to an end this ministry. The latter miracle led to important teaching from Jesus, presumably in the temple (5:14), in rebuttal of the Jews' criticism that he had healed on the sabbath day.

## **The Galilean ministry**

This was the longest ministry, lasting some two years. Jesus and the twelve disciples, who were chosen during this ministry, mostly came from Galilee, and they would be familiar with the area and known in some of the places where they taught. This was the case when the Lord went to the Nazareth synagogue where he had been bought up (Lk. 4:16). He taught also in the synagogue at Capernaum, and healed there, and he preached in other synagogues in Galilee (v. 44). His popularity became so great that Mark records that he could not go openly into the city of Capernaum, "but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter" (1:45). After a while, he entered Capernaum again, and went to the house where Peter and Andrew lived (v. 29; 2:1,2) and preached there. It was here that the paralysed man was lowered through the tiling in the roof because the crowds were so great, and Jesus commended the faith of the paralysed man and the four men who lowered him.

After this the Lord went to the seaside and taught the multitude who followed him there (2:13). Jesus healed the man with the withered hand in the synagogue at Capernaum on the sabbath, which stirred the wrath of the Jews, who were monitoring closely what he said and did

(3:1-6). Again, Jesus withdrew to the sea, only to be followed by a huge crowd. The disciples had a small ship ready in case he should be thronged, for the people pressed near him to touch him and be healed of their diseases (vv. 7-10).

After he had chosen the twelve, he took them up into a mountain, where they listened to the wonderful teaching of the 'Sermon on the Mount' (Mt. 5-7). Returning to Capernaum, he healed a leper and also the centurion's servant, as he entered the city. It was here that Jesus turned to those who were following him and said, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel . . . Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee" (8:1-13). Jesus gave the Parable of the Sower sitting in a ship on the shore of the Sea of Galilee because the multitudes were so great (13:1,2). The Lord taught in the village of Nain and there raised to life the widow's son, an act that convinced all that "a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited His people" (Lk. 7:16). The record says that "he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him" (8:1). A thorough preaching campaign! By his great acts of healing Jesus 'showed' the Kingdom of God, for these things will be done again. Mark 5 records the healing of the demoniac, the haemorrhaging woman and, as a culmination, the raising to life of the ruler of the synagogue's daughter. Thus it was twice in Galilee that the dead were raised.

### **The last six months of the Galilean ministry**

Around the time of Passover, Jesus fed the 5,000 as a practical follow-up to his day of preaching in the "desert place". That night he walked on the sea to the disciples, who were toiling in the boat to cross the lake, and the boat landed at Gennesaret (Jno. 6:4; Mk. 6:34-53). Here the people thronged about him, bringing their sick on stretchers, and "as many as touched him were made whole" (Mk. 6:54-56). From Capernaum Jesus went north and visited Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia. He tried to be anonymous but he could not be hidden. Here he healed the daughter of the quick-witted and faithful Canaanite woman. In Decapolis, south of Capernaum, the Lord healed the deaf and dumb man, to the astonished pleasure of the inhabitants, who said, "He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak" (7:36,37). Here he fed the 4,000 in "the wilderness" after preaching to them for three days (8:2-4). At Caesarea Philippi, where the Lord and

his disciples preached, Peter made his confession, on which the ecclesia is founded (8:27-29).

In a mountain, possibly Hermon, the transfiguration took place, and the lunatic boy was healed as they came down from the mountain (9:9-29). Shortly after this, Jesus went to the Feast of Tabernacles in the temple, separately from his disciples, and taught, raising the ire of the Jews, who sent officers to apprehend him, but were unable to take him (Jno. 7). The next day he came to the temple again, and he taught the people early in the morning (8:1,2), only to have the scribes and Pharisees bring into the midst of the crowd a woman who had been taken in adultery. Jesus may have returned to Galilee at this point (v. 59).

### **The Perea ministry**

This area to the northeast of the Dead Sea was heavily populated with Jews in the time of Jesus, and this is where Jesus carried out the remainder of his public preaching before the final week in Jerusalem. He left Galilee (Mt. 19:1; Mk. 10:1). He visited Jerusalem several times in the course of this period. Luke 10 records how the seventy he sent out before him (v. 1) returned with joy (v. 17), and we are told of Jesus' prayer of thanks for their successful mission (v. 21). He preached everywhere. In chapter 11 Luke speaks of people "gathered thick together" (v. 29), and of Jesus' being invited by a Pharisee for a meal (v. 37). During the meal Jesus was very blunt with the Pharisee and a lawyer. Outside the crowds were so thick that "they trode one upon another" (12:1). He taught in one of the synagogues in the region (13:10), and there healed an infirm woman on the sabbath. The ruler of the synagogue criticised him, but was put to shame in the hearing of the people by Jesus' reply (13:17).

At this time, Jesus went to Jerusalem and healed the man born blind, which gave the Lord opportunity to talk to the Pharisees (Jno. 9-10). At the Feast of the Dedication (Purim) in the winter (Jno. 10:22-42) Jesus again argued with the Jews in the temple, leading to them trying to stone him. He retreated to Bethabara (vv. 40-42), but then returned to Jerusalem, where he dined with one of the chief Pharisees (Lk. 14:1-24) and healed a dropsical man on the sabbath, leading to mixed reactions amongst those at the meal. Great multitudes followed him (v. 25), and he taught them unpalatable things. When the Pharisees and scribes gathered round too, he gave three parables, including the Parable of the Prodigal Son. About

this time Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, as a result of which, John records, “many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him” (11:45).

Passing through Samaria he healed ten lepers, and the only one to come back and thank him was a Samaritan. Coming to Jericho, he gave sight to a blind beggar, and “the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God” (Lk. 18:43). Jesus showed his lack of partiality when he dined with Zacchaeus, the chief among the publicans, and “all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner” (19:7). Luke then records (19:28) that he “went before, ascending up to Jerusalem”. The last week of the Lord’s life was spent in Jerusalem and Bethany.

He commuted into Jerusalem from the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, and on one occasion he cast out those who sold and bought in the temple, teaching as he did so. The Jews were unable to touch him, “for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine” (Mk. 11:15-19). On another occasion, “as he was walking in the temple” (v. 27), the Jews questioned him, and Jesus took the opportunity to speak parables and answer their trick questions (Mark 12). Matthew 23 records how Jesus denounced the scribes and

Pharisees in the audience of the people and the disciples (v. 1). Seated on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gave his disciples the signs of his coming and of the end of the age, and also parables about the judgement to come (Mt. 24–25). The public preaching ended here, although the Last Supper and Christ’s discourses to the disciples in the upper room and Garden of Gethsemane (Jno. 13–17) are full of wonderful teaching.

### **Conclusion**

In three years the Lord Jesus taught whenever opportunities arose. He did not “compass sea and land to make one proselyte” (Mt. 23:15), but preached in his own country and to his neighbours. He travelled more than once through many places. He preached by word, deed and example. The places he preached were wherever people could be found. The Gospels record him preaching in homes, in the country, in synagogues, in the temple, by the seaside, walking along the way, resting himself, sitting on mountains and hillsides, at mealtimes, sitting in a boat and at a wedding. We cannot yet do his mighty works, but may the Truth be so dominant in our lives that we live it always, and preach, as he did, at every opportunity.