



Excerpts from *The Great Physician*  
For study related to the Bible Lesson March 1 - 7, 2010

Introductory Note – *The Great Physician*, Vols 1 & 2 were written by Vinton Dearing, Christian Scientist, who was Professor of English at UCLA where he taught the English Bible as Literature for forty years. The book is a composite translation of the four Gospels, organized by event rather than book, and includes a commentary. Because of the composite nature of the translation and commentary, the excerpts below may cover more topics than the citation in the Lesson. The paperback two-volume set of books is available for purchase on amazon.com and a hardback study edition available through amazon.com and at [vintondearing.com](http://vintondearing.com).

**SECTION II – B4 (Matthew 5:48)**

These verses are part of a much larger passage, on which Dearing makes extensive commentary in his book. Please see the book or contact me ([doug\\_mccormick@email.com](mailto:doug_mccormick@email.com)) for the excerpt if you are interested.

**SECTION V – B15 (Matthew 4: 16, 17, 23)**

JESUS MOVES TO CAPERNAUM

Matthew 4:13-16 Luke 4:31

Turning now to Matthew, whose account is fuller than Luke's here: "And leaving Nazareth he came and housed [himself] in Capernaum-by-the-sea, in the boundaries [formerly occupied by the Hebrew tribes] of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that the statement [that came] through the prophet Isaiah [Isaiah 9:1-2] would be fulfilled, which says,

The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,  
the sea road across the Jordan,  
Galilee of the [many] races —  
the people sitting in darkness saw a great light  
and to those sitting in the region and shadow  
of death a light arose."

The "sea" referred to is the lake of Galilee, and "across" the Jordan is to its west. Matthew presumably expected his readers to recognize that he was quoting a passage from the beginning of Isaiah's prophecy of "the Prince of Peace," the Messiah and the coming of his everlasting kingdom. He wrenched the first part of the quotation out of its original context, but that was an acceptable way of interpreting the Bible in his time. Luke omits the quotation and the clause that introduces it.<sup>66</sup>

**Footnotes**

66. Capernaum in Jesus' day appears to have been laid out with a main north-south street and intersecting side streets, the dwellings filling the intervening spaces, though they may have had

interior courts. The description of the buildings in *ABD*, I, 866-869, written by one of the excavators, rests somewhat more on descriptions of houses and courtyards in the Talmud and on analogy with modern Palestinian dwellings than it does on the physical remains. One should compare it, for instance, with the description and photographs in *BAR*, VIII:6 (November/December 1982), 26-37, and see *BAR*, VII:1 (January/February 1981), 55.

The “sea road,” says Anson F. Rainey, “is the famous road from Paneas (Caesarea Philippi = [modern] Baniyas) to Tyre, marked by the milestones found in Lebanon and the north Hula Valley. It is undoubtedly the Way of the Sea mentioned in Isaiah 9:1 (English [8:23 in the Hebrew Bible]) and the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus used that road when he visited the ‘region of Tyre and Sidon’ (Mark 3:8; Matthew 15:21) and probably when he came to the ‘region of Caesarea Philippi’ (Mark 8:27, Matthew 16:13). There is no other Way of the Sea (or Via Maris) in the Holy Land, contrary to modern tour-guide mythology” (*BAR*, XXIV:5 [September/October 1998], 16, and see the *Macmillan Bible Atlas*, 3rd ed. rev., New York: Macmillan, 1993). Rainey adds that the road “was well used until 1922, when the area was split between the mandates of Britain and France.”

The tour guides may have consulted the *Harper Atlas of the Bible*, ed. James B. Pritchard, New York: Harper and Row [1987], p. 155, which shows a road running along the west side of the Sea of Galilee and continuing down the Jordan Valley, but indicates that from Tiberias north its course is uncertain. The atlas shows it passing Capernaum to the west.

There is some doubt about Matthew’s freedom to take passages out of context. According to Neusner, *First-Century Judaism*, pp. 117-118, Johanan b. Zakkai, Jesus’ contemporary, did not do this, the practice began with Nahum of Gimzo later in the century. But, as I point out on pp. 589-590, we do not know how soon Matthew was written, nor, Neusner would now say, can we be sure the practice began with Nahum (see, e.g., his *Introduction to Rabbinic Literature*, New York: Doubleday [1994], pp. xxx-xxxii).

### JESUS’ TEACHING IN A NUTSHELL

Matthew 4:17 Mark 1:15 Luke 4:31-32

Matthew then says, “From that time, Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near.’” Mark’s summary is similar: “The right time has been fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near; repent, and trust in the good news.” Luke does not summarize the teaching but says “he was teaching them on the Sabbath days. And they were wondering at his teaching, for his word was with authority.” **“With authority” means more than “as befits an expert” or “without citation of precedents,” it means, as the whole tenor of Jesus’ life shows, “with God-given authority to heal and bless.”**

According to Matthew, as we have seen, John the Baptist also said “The kingdom of heaven has drawn near; repent and believe the good news.” But Jesus made the words his own, telling his students to use them also, as we shall see. It is important, therefore, to review what Jesus meant by them.<sup>67</sup>

Toward the end of Jesus’ ministry, Luke says, he told the Pharisees, “the kingdom of God is within you.” So understood, the kingdom of God is a sense of inseparability from the ever-presence and all-power of divine Truth and Love, a God-given sense and therefore itself also ever-present within us. Truth is always pressing upon us to recognize it, for its opposite cannot be permanent. Sooner or later error will expose itself or be exposed and will vanish, whereas truth is eternal. As long as circumstances are the same, a transitory or evanescent truth about them is a

contradiction in terms, an absurdity. We are shortly to see more fully what Jesus told his followers they must do and think if they were to maintain that correct understanding of God, that unity with God, which would enable them to meet their own needs and the needs of others then, now and always.<sup>68</sup>

#### Footnotes

67. Matthew 3:2, 10:7.

68. Luke 17:21.

Mark 1:39 Matthew 4:23-25 Luke 4:44

Matthew now rejoins the others. Mark says: “And he went into all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and throwing out demons.” (Luke says that Jesus “was preaching in the synagogues of Judea,” but as “Judea” is a slip of the pen most manuscripts have “Galilee” instead.) Matthew says: “And Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom [of God, that is, that it had drawn near and was knocking at the door, waiting to be recognized], and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. And his fame went out into all Syria [the next Roman province to the north, roughly modern Syria]. And they brought to him all those ill with different sicknesses and those in great pain, and demoniacs and epileptics and paralytics, and he healed them. And many crowds followed him [that came] from Galilee and the Decapolis [east of Galilee] and Jerusalem and Judea and across [east of] the Jordan [that is, from Perea].”<sup>80</sup>

#### Footnotes

80. For the word translated “epileptics” see pp. 340-341.

### **SECTION V – B16 (Matthew 17:1-9)**

#### TRANSFIGURATION

Mark 9:2-10 Matthew 17:1-9 Luke 9:28-36

Continuing as before. “And after six days Jesus takes with [him] Peter and James and John and takes them up into a high mountain by themselves alone, and was transfigured in front of them.”

The Church of the Transfiguration is on Mt. Tabor, in central Galilee, but Jesus and his students are at the foot of Mt. Hermon and return to Galilee only later. Therefore Mt. Hermon, which rises to 9100 feet above sea level, is more likely to have been the place where the transfiguration occurred.<sup>78</sup>

Each of the three Gospels uses different words to describe the transfiguration itself. Mark: “And his clothes became shining, very white, so much so that no clothes-cleaner on earth could whiten [them] so.” Matthew: “And his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light.” Luke: “And while he was praying, the appearance of his face became different and his clothes gleamed white like lightning.” His appearance was much like Moses’ when he came down from Mt. Sinai with the two stone tablets on which God had written the Ten Commandments. Moses’ face shone so that his people were afraid to look at him. The shining can be thought of as the reflection of God’s glory or as a radiant sense of the presence of God. We see radiant faces

around us from time to time, and from time to time hear those who speak of moments of spiritual illumination being accompanied by a sense of being surrounded by bright light. From these experiences we can get some sense of what Jesus was feeling.<sup>79</sup>

Continuing as before. “And Elijah with Moses was seen by them and they were speaking with Jesus.”

Luke adds that they spoke “about his [Jesus] ‘exodus,’ which he was going to fulfill in Jerusalem. And Peter and those with him had been weighted down with sleep [while Jesus was praying], but when they were fully awakened they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.”

Moses and Elijah represent The Law and the Prophets, as they do in Revelation 11:3-6, where they are not named but described, one (Elijah) able to prevent rain, and the other (Moses) able to turn water to blood. Jesus’ communion with the Bible was so intense on this occasion that its two greatest examples of the power of God in human affairs appeared to Jesus’ students as the men themselves, both encouraging and warning him. Moses had ultimately failed of his goal of entering Canaan with his people because he did not listen closely enough to God, whereas Elijah’s more careful listening brought about his ascension. Their examples in these respects would have confirmed Jesus in his determination to obey his Father whatever the cost.

Continuing as before. “And Peter says to Jesus in response, ‘Rabbi, it’s good for us to be here. And we’ll make three shelters, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ For he did not know what to say in response [to what they had seen].<sup>80</sup>

“And while he was speaking there came a cloud and overshadowed them. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, hear him.’”

All three Gospels say the students were frightened by what they saw and heard. I quote Matthew: “And when the students heard it [the voice] they fell on their face and feared greatly, and Jesus came to them and grasping them said, ‘Rouse up and don’t be afraid.’”<sup>81</sup>

Continuing as before. “And suddenly they looked around and no longer saw anyone except Jesus alone with themselves. And as they were coming down out of the mountain he ordered them not to describe what they saw to anyone until the Son of man would arise from among the dead.” Mark adds, “And they grappled with what he said, arguing among themselves, ‘What is “the resurrection from among the dead?”’”

### Footnotes

78. Queen Helena, the mother of the emperor Constantine and an early archaeologist in the holy places, supposed that Mt. Tabor was the site (*ABD*, IV, 1050), perhaps because Tabor and Mt. Hermon are associated in Psalm 89:12, and Egeria, toward the end of the fourth century, so described it (*ABD*, VI, 305). See *Egeria’s Travels*, p. 176 (the italics are explained in n. 1, p. 174). For more details see Kopp, *The Holy Places*, pp. 242-247. But the Bordeaux pilgrim (333) thought the place was on the Mount of Olives (see *Egeria’s Travels*, p. 160).

79. Moses’ face shining: Exodus 34:29-30.

80. “Shelters”: literally, “tents,” but the word was also used for the shelters of branches erected at the feast of Tabernacles or Booths.

81. Mark and Luke tell of the apostles’ fright at slightly different places in their narratives than Matthew does, but may be accepted as agreeing with him. See Matthew 17:6 (frightened by the voice), Mark 9:6 (frightened at seeing Moses and Elijah), Luke 9:34 (frightened when the cloud engulfed them).

**SECTION VI – B20 (Luke 24:50-53)**

Luke 24:50-53

Luke's Gospel, which skips over the apostles' going to Galilee, ends as follows: "And [after Jesus in Jerusalem told the apostles to stay there until they clothed themselves with heaven-sent power] he led them out [on the road over the Mount of Olives] as far as [the turn off] to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it happened [that] while he blessed them, he parted from them and was being carried up into heaven. And doing reverence to him they returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple precincts blessing God."<sup>166</sup>

166. "[On the road over the Mount of Olives] as far as [the turnoff] to Bethany": I am harmonizing with Acts 1:12, which says the apostles returned from the Mount of Olives, and various traditions that Jesus' ascension occurred at some place on top of the mount (see *ABD*, V, 14-15; also the map on p. 37 in *Egeria's Travels* and the discussion on pp. 49-53; a summary of the early traditions about and commemorations of the ascension is in Kopp, *The Holy Places*, pp. 405-417). I am also explaining away a redundancy in Luke, *heôs pros*, "as far as to": *heôs* would have been enough if Luke had meant that the ascension took place in or near Bethany. See Luke 2:15, where the shepherds seeking the baby Jesus go "as far as (*heôs*) Bethlehem."