

Wrestling for the Presence of Jesus

Zebulun and Naphtali Host the Ministry of Jesus

Isaiah 9:1 Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations.

Isaiah 9:2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

Let us reflect today upon the profound significance of Zebulun and Naphtali, two tribes of Israel whose stories intertwine with the prophecy of the coming Messiah. In Matthew 4:13-16, we find Jesus beginning His ministry in the very regions associated with these tribes. Their history, their struggles, and their prophetic fulfillment lead us to a deeper understanding of God's redemptive plan—one that includes a promise of hope for the marginalized and forgotten.

1. The Struggle and the Desire for Love: The births of Zebulun and Naphtali highlight the emotional struggles of their mothers, Leah and Rachel, who vied for the affection of Jacob. Zebulun, Leah's son, means "dwelling" or "to dwell"—a reflection of her longing for Jacob's love, believing that motherhood would secure his attention. When she bore Zebulun, she proclaimed, "Now will my husband dwell with me" (Genesis 30:20, KJV). On the other hand, Naphtali, born to Rachel through Bilhah, represents the emotional wrestle of a sisterly rivalry. Rachel's declaration, "With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed" (Genesis 30:8, KJV), signifies her desperation for acknowledgment and love. These names and stories illustrate the universal longing for connection and the places of struggle we find ourselves in as we seek to be valued. They compel us to recognize that our own spiritual journeys are often characterized by wrestling to draw nearer to God, longing for His presence in our lives—*Immanuel*, God with us.

2. Jesus, the Light in the Galilee: Nazareth, the hometown of Jesus, became the epicenter of His light, symbolizing hope not only for the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali but also for all who feel marginalized and overlooked. The Galilee was more than just a geographical location; it represented God's divine plan to redeem those who often felt forgotten by society.

Jesus' choice to embark on His ministry in these less-esteemed regions illustrates a profound truth: that no person, no tribe, and no situation is beyond divine restoration. He chose to begin His work among Zebulun and Naphtali—a remarkable honor for these tribes. While Judah often received much praise and attention as the tribe of kings, it is in Zebulun and Naphtali that Jesus made His humble entrance into public ministry. This act signifies that even the least among us are valued in the kingdom of God. The rest of Israel, filled with skepticism, kept questioning, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46, KJV). But the truth of the matter is, let Jesus decide what is good. His light shines brightly in unexpected places, and He refuses to overlook those whom the world overlooks. Let us take heart in knowing that Jesus honors the least members of His church in ways we cannot even imagine.

3. Striving for His Presence: As we reflect on the struggles of Leah and Rachel, we are invited to wrestle in our own lives for the presence of Christ. Just as Leah and Rachel contended for Jacob's affection, we too must become earnest seekers of the Lord's presence. In our longing for Him to dwell among us, we echo the same desires of the mothers who wished for their husband's love. “A heart that wrestles in prayer,” as C.S. Lewis described, laboriously seeks the Lord, knowing that He has promised us in James 4:8, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (KJV). Just as the light of Christ illuminated the darkness inhabiting Zebulun and Naphtali, His presence can break into our struggles and bring about transformations we never thought possible.

The tribe of Naphtali, named for Rachel's struggle for affection, embodies the essence of wrestling, both literally and figuratively. When Rachel declared, “With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed” (Genesis 30:8, KJV), she not only referenced her personal competitions but also foreshadowed the struggles that her descendants would face. Naphtali's territory, located in the northern region of Israel, often found itself engulfed in darkness due to foreign oppression and spiritual disconnection from God. It was within this context of struggle and despair that Jesus chose to begin His ministry. By coming to Galilee, particularly the region associated with Naphtali, He offered the light of hope and salvation to those who were lost.

In essence, Jesus' arrival marked a significant turning point in the history of Naphtali and Zebulun. As prophesied in Isaiah 9:1-2, “the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up” (KJV). Through His ministry, Christ engaged in a spiritual wrestling match, seeking to reclaim the heritage of

these tribes from the shadow of despair. He did not shy away from the mournful history of Naphtali; rather, He stepped into it to change their narrative forever. By ministering to those marginalized and suffering, Jesus wrestled with their darkness, offering healing, restoration, and a radically new identity in Him. His mission was to redeem their story, transforming their struggles into testimonies of hope and victory, demonstrating that with God, no history is beyond redemption, and no tribe is too insignificant to receive His light.

4. A Ministry for the Marginalized: In Jesus' ministry, we see a clear intention towards the marginalized. By beginning His work in Galilee, He declared that His grace is available to all—regardless of social status, tribe, or circumstance. His interactions with the outcasts and the downtrodden show us that no one is beyond redemption or hope. Isaiah 61:1 resonates with this notion: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (KJV). In His ministry, Jesus deliberately chose to reach those who felt invisible, demonstrating that His love and grace transcend societal boundaries and expectations. His illuminating presence was particularly needed for those who identified with the plight of Zebulun and Naphtali, providing a beacon of hope in dark times.

5. Preparing Our Hearts for His Return: As we navigate through our lives, we are constantly reminded that we must remain prepared for the return of our Savior. Just as the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were granted the honor of hosting Jesus' ministry, we too are called to prepare our hearts and communities for His second coming. The anticipation of Christ's return should ignite a fervent desire within us to strive for His presence in our everyday lives. “For ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (Matthew 24:42, KJV) reminds us that our preparations begin now—through prayer, worship, and a heart that longs to welcome Him. There is honor in being ready for the Lord; He honors those whom the world may overlook. Just as He chose to begin His ministry in the humble towns of Galilee, we can trust that He will honor our sincere efforts to seek Him. In our spiritual wrestling, we are not alone. Our struggles deepen our relationship with God, preparing us for the moment when He returns to claim His people.

As we uncover the significance of Zebulun and Naphtali, we realize that their story transcends generations and extends an invitation to us. Their struggles mirror our own, showcasing the universal longing for connection, love, and acceptance. Jesus' light shone

brightly in the Galilee, a reminder that He cares for the marginalized and the overlooked. The Galilee, through which our Lord chose to walk and minister, heralds the truth that divine restoration and hope can arise even from the most unexpected places. Let us strive earnestly to draw near to Him, just as Leah and Rachel contended for Jacob's love. Let us place our struggles before Him and allow His light to transform our darkness into hope. In our pursuit of His presence, may we remember that He is Immanuel—God with us—and He honors us in ways we cannot fathom. Let us pray, asking the Lord to strengthen our resolve to wrestle for His presence and to prepare our hearts for His return. May we proclaim, with fresh hope, that Jesus will not overlook the least among us, and may we look forward with joy to His coming again.