

Theme: Jesus Revealed - The Light of the World

Text: Matthew 4:12-17, 23

12 Now when Jesus heard that John [the Baptist] had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. **13** And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, **14** that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: **15** "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, *By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles:* **16** The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned." **17** From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"...**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.

Have you ever been in complete and total darkness before? I mean in a place that's so dark you can't even see your hand if you put it right in front of your face. Darkness so thick that you can almost "feel" it. Have you ever been in a place like that?

A few summers ago my family and I toured a cave in Wisconsin. During this tour you come to a very narrow area in the deepest point of the cave and to give you a sense of total darkness they shut all the lights off for a few moments. Let me tell you, if you are even the least bit claustrophobic that is not the place for you! The complete darkness, the confined space, and the sense of being so deep in the ground were quite frightening. I'm glad they didn't leave the lights off for any longer than they did (To be honest, I think my 2 year old nephew, whom I was carrying, handled it better than I did!).

In a situation like that you are desperate for even a little light. A small flashlight, a candle, or even a lighted match would make a world of difference if you were ever trapped inside the complete darkness of that cave.

Our text for this morning speaks of people who were sitting in "**darkness**" (v. 16). A "**darkness**" even deeper and more frightening than that of a confined space in the bottom of a cave: The "**darkness**" of sin, unbelief, and death. However, our text also speaks of a "**light**"—not of a "little light" that might be helpful and comforting in the midst of total darkness—but of a "**great light!**" (v. 16). A Light that completely eradicated the "**darkness.**" That "**Light,**" of course, is Jesus. In this, the second sermon in our Epiphany series on some of the ways Jesus is "**Revealed**" in the Bible we will see how Jesus is **The Light of the World.**

Jesus once said of Himself, "**I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life**" (John 8:12). Where there is light there cannot be darkness. When you walk into a dark room, no matter how dark it is, when you turn on the lights it is no longer dark. That's what God did, in a sense, when He sent Jesus into this world. In our Gospel reading from the first chapter of John we read, "**In Him [Jesus] was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it**" (John 1:4-5). That word for "**comprehend**" in the Greek literally means to "*seize or grasp with force.*" And so this verse could also be translated, "**And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overpower it.**" Where Jesus, **The Light of the World** is, there can be no darkness. Jesus overpowers it! Where Jesus is there is forgiveness, healing, and life!

The areas that are spoken of in our text, the regions in and around Galilee, were the areas in which Jesus spent most of His life and conducted much of His ministry here on earth. This area was populated by many Gentiles (non-Jews) along with the Jews who lived there. This mixture of pagan foreigners had an effect on the religious life of the people in that region. While the worship of the true God was followed by some, this area had by-in-large departed from the worship which God Himself had called for. The quote from Isaiah's prophecy in our text described this region as **"people who sat in darkness...who sat in the region and shadow of death" (v. 16)**. The **darkness** of false beliefs, unbelief, and sin reigned in that region. That is, until Jesus came! Our text, quoting from Isaiah, says, **"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned" (v. 15-16)**.

Jesus, the **"Light,"** came to spread His light and shine it upon all people. Our text tells us, **"From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'...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" (v. 17, 23)**. Jesus preached **"repentance,"** a turning away from sins and a turning to Him for forgiveness and life. Jesus preached the **"gospel"**—literally, the "Good News"—**"of the kingdom"** of heaven. The "Good News" He preached was the truth that He was the Son of God who had come to be the Savior from sin—for both the Jews and the Gentiles. He would complete that "Good News" by later suffering and dying on the cross for the sins of all people and then rising victoriously from the dead three days later. Notice also that Jesus came to be a light for the people amidst the **"darkness"** of the physical effects that sin has brought into this world as well. The last verse of our text tells us that Jesus went about **"healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people" (v. 23)**.

I began our sermon by asking if you've ever been in complete and total darkness before. I can say with certainty that all of us here have. In fact, everyone who's ever been born into this world has. All of us, by nature, are like the people of the region of Galilee in our text. We were born as **"people who sat in darkness...who sat in the region and shadow of death" (v. 16)**. We were born lost in the complete and utter darkness of sin and unbelief and headed for the eternal darkness of death in hell. That is until Jesus **The Light of the World** dawned on us! Jesus has dispelled our darkness by preaching the Gospel—the "Good News"—of the kingdom of heaven to us—not in person, like He did to the people in the region of Galilee in His day, but rather through His representatives: our parents, Sunday School and Christian Day School teachers, and our pastors. He still does, however, come to us personally through His Word and calls us to repent of our sins and turn to Him for forgiveness. He comes to us in the miracle of His Sacraments: In the water and the Word of Baptism He makes us His own (as we witnessed this morning with the baptism of baby Clare at our worship service in Mountain View); in the bread and the wine He comes to us with His very body and blood reminding us, assuring us personally that your sins have been forgiven. He still heals us from our sicknesses and comforts our troubled hearts.

Now that we've had the rays of the S-O-N, **The Light of the World**, shine upon our hearts something amazing has happened to us who once **"sat in darkness."** Jesus has made us **"lights"** in this dark world! He tells us in Matthew's Gospel, **"You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14)**. Jesus wants us to be reflections of His **"Light"** that point people to Him **The Light of the World**.

I don't think I need to remind you just how "dark" a place this world is, or how spiritually "dark" our area of the country is. In fact, you could say that we live in an area that is much like the region spoken about in our text: **"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali...the Galilee of the Gentiles."** A region of **"people who sat in darkness...who sat in the region and shadow of death" (v. 15-16)**. Surveys of the Bay Area consistently show that this is the most un-churched

(referring to people who do not go to church) and the most de-churched (referring to people who have stopped going to church) in our country—and it's not even close! The Bay Area is also ranked sixth in the country in percentage of people who have never actually been to church. (See, for example, the Barna Research Group's findings: <http://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2015/04/28/san-francisco-bay-area-least-church-going-metro-in-america/>)

We can at times be overwhelmed by this great “darkness.” We may even be tempted to despair because our light seems so small, both individually and as a congregation. But remember what I said earlier, “In complete darkness even a little light makes a huge difference.” That’s when light shines the brightest; in the darkness. That is why God encourages us throughout the New Testament to let Christ’s light shine in our lives. Jesus goes on to say in that same chapter of Matthew, **“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16)**. The Apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians, **“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8)**. And the Apostle Peter tells us that we have been **“called out of darkness into His marvelous light”** that we **“may proclaim the praises of Him [God]” (1 Peter 2:9)**.

Have you ever been in complete and total darkness? Yes, you have. I have too. We all know people who are still living in **“darkness”** without **The Light of the World**, Jesus Christ, shining on them. God in His grace has *revealed* the **“Light”** of salvation in Christ to you and me. He wants us to share that **“Light”** and let our lights shine to His glory. Where Jesus is, there can be no darkness. Let’s share and shine that **Light of the World** to the world! Amen.