

The Great Light

Mt 4:12-17

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. In the days before electricity, a tightfisted old farmer was taking his hired man to task for carrying a lighted lantern when he went to call on his girl.
 - 1. The farmer said, “When I went a-courtin’ I never carried one of them things. I always went in the dark.”
 - 2. “Yes,” said the hired man, “and look at what you got!”
- B. There are certainly times that we need a light.
 - 1. Would any of us want to drive after dark without our headlights?
 - 2. My mom would often rearrange the furniture after everyone was in bed.
 - a. Dad had to get up for work at 4:00 am.
 - b. He always made sure that he turned the lights on before he walked through the living room lest Mom had rearranged the furniture & he fall over something.
- C. In this morning’s text, Jesus is referred to as “a great light.”
 - 1. In the Scriptures, Jesus is references as the light of the world.
 - a. Jn 1:9.
 - b. Jn 8:12.
 - 2. This morning’s text uses the imagery of Jesus as the light of the world.
 - 3. As “THE GREAT LIGHT,” Jesus is A MOVING LIGHT, A MULTINATIONAL LIGHT, & A MISSIONAL LIGHT.

II. A MOVING LIGHT, vv 12-13.

- A. READ TEXT.
- B. As “THE GREAT LIGHT” Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum.
 - 1. Nazareth was a small agricultural village & Capernaum was a larger fishing town on the northwest edge of the Sea of Galilee.
 - 2. Jesus moves from a small community to a larger town.
 - a. Obviously, there are going to be far more opportunities to preach.
 - b. God cares deeply about souls.
 - 1) It is he, after all, who gave his Son to die for the sins of the entire world.
 - 2) While the souls in Nazareth were just as important as those in Capernaum, Jesus’ ministry in a larger town will provide more people with an opportunity to hear the truth.
 - 3. It’s certainly also possible that Capernaum was chosen because it was the hometown of Peter (Mk 1:29).
 - a. Peter becomes a very important Apostle—Jesus gave to him the keys of the kingdom & throughout Acts, Peter serves as the spokesman for the Twelve.
 - b. Therefore, it’s very possible that God providentially led his Son to Capernaum so that he could train this important disciple for his coming task.
- C. Matthew informs us that it was after Jesus heard that John had been arrested that he moved from Nazareth to Capernaum.
 - 1. Only Matthew tells us that it was after John’s arrest that Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum.
 - 2. The timing of Jesus’ move seems to be quite important.
 - a. Were it not important, would the Spirit have even had Matthew pen those words?
 - b. The importance is that Jesus is seen here as fulfilling John’s ministry: at v 17 Matthew records that Jesus preached the **exact same** message as John.
 - 1) In writing for a Jewish audience, Matthew uses much Scripture to make his point about Jesus.

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- 2) Back in chapter 3, Matthew has demonstrated that John is the forerunner of whom the prophets spoke; in showing that Jesus takes up John's ministry, Matthew is saying, "This is the Christ."
- c. That tells us why Matthew informs us that Jesus takes up John's ministry, but why did the Lord take up his cousin's unfinished ministry?
 - 1) Ministry is **never** about a single person; John came & pointed the way to Jesus, but John's preaching wasn't about John.
 - 2) Thus, fulfilling a ministry is a team effort.
 - a) It was in Corinth: 1 Cor 3:5-8.
 - b) It was in Samaria.
 - i. Philip preached in Samaria & many were baptized (Acts 8:12).
 - ii. Yet, because he was not an apostle, Philip could not give the brethren there the miraculous measure of the Spirit to establish them in the faith; therefore Peter & John went to Samaria & bestowed upon them miraculous gifts (Acts 8:14-17).
 - 3) Ministry today continues to be a team effort.
 - a) That was the point Paul to the Corinthians about their different gifts.
 - i. Remember that the Corinthians were bickering over whose gift was better.
 - ii. Paul says, 1 Cor 12:24b-25—only by ministering together could the Corinthians be a complete body.
 - b) Phil 1:27.
 - c) Are we working together—striving side by side—for the glory of God?
- D. Luke informs us of yet another reason that Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum: He was rejected at Nazareth.
 1. Lk 4:28-30.
 2. Imagine that audacity for just a moment—here is the Son of God & he's driven out of his hometown because what he says doesn't sit well.
 - a. The words of Jesus were often rejected.
 - 1) When Jesus said that he was the true bread from heaven, we read (Jn 6:66).
 - 2) After Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell all he had & follow him, "he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions" (Mt 19:22).
 - b. We, like those in the synagogue at Nazareth, can drive Jesus out of our lives because what he says is difficult.
 - c. Shall we reject the Christ?

II. A MULTINATIONAL LIGHT, vv 13-16.

A. READ TEXT.

- B. Matthew doesn't just tell us that THE GREAT LIGHT moved from Nazareth to Capernaum; he also informs us that he moved to the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali.
 1. Actually, Capernaum was within the borders of Naphtali, but it was not in the territory of Zebulun.
 2. But, Matthew says that Jesus lived in the territory of Zebulun **and** Naphtali, but Jesus did not live in Zebulun.
 - a. Why would Matthew make a geographical mistake?
 - b. Obviously, I do not believe for a second that Matthew made a geographical mistake, but I do believe this is important to notice or I wouldn't mention it.
 - 1) I don't even believe that Matthew is speaking of geography.
 - 2) He quotes from Isaiah 9 which lumps Zebulun & Naphtali together.
 - a) Isaiah lumps the two territories together as the "Galilee of the nations."
 - b) Matthew says that Jesus metaphorically lived in these two territories, for it was from the "Galilee of the nations" that Jesus began his ministry to all people.
 - C. From Isaiah 9:1, Matthew refers to Zebulun and Naphtali as the "Galilee of the Gentiles."
 1. Zebulun & Naphtali lay on the northern border of the Promised Land; therefore, when aggressors came from the north, these territories were attacked before the rest of the land.
 2. Additionally, many Egyptians, Arabians, and Phoenicians lived in this territory.

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3. Capernaum was located on one of the major trade routes of Palestine; thus, many Gentiles would be coming & going through this region.
 4. While Jesus ministered almost exclusively to the Jews, his ministry in Capernaum did provide opportunities to minister to Gentiles.
 - a. In Capernaum, Jesus healed the servant of a centurion (Mt 8:5-13).
 - b. When Jesus went to Tyre & Sidon, he healed the daughter of a Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28).
- D. The point of all this is that Jesus came to the Gentiles as well as the Jews.
1. While Jesus himself never spent a great deal of time with Gentiles, he taught his disciples to minister to all people.
 - a. Mt 28:19a.
 - b. Lk 24:46-47.
 - c. Acts 1:8b.
 2. The apostles responded to that message fervently.
 - a. After some prodding from the Holy Spirit, Peter preached to Cornelius & his household & he was able to baptize this Gentile family into Christ.
 - b. Peter was entrusted with the gospel to the Jews & Peter was entrusted with the gospel to the Gentiles: Gal 2:7.
 3. What great news for us!
 - a. You & I—who did not descend from Abraham—have an opportunity to come to salvation through the Christ.
 - b. All people, regardless of their pedigree, can have their sins cleansed by the Son of God who came to save the world.
- E. Not only does Jesus' moving to Capernaum foreshadow the ministry to the Gentiles, but it also demonstrates that "the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned," v 16.
1. The metaphor of darkness in Scripture is used to illustrate several truths.
 - a. Darkness refers to a lack of divine revelation (Mic 3:6-7).
 - b. Darkness also refers to sin (Eph 5:8-12).
 - c. Darkness refers to punishment (Mt 8:11-12).
 - d. Those three concepts are tightly connected: with divine revelation, people will live in sin & living in sin leads to punishment.
 2. As the light, Jesus stands as the remedy of those three problems.
 - a. Jesus came into this world as divine revelation: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known" (Jn 1:18).
 - b. Jesus came to remove sin: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29).
 - c. Jesus came to remove man's punishment for sin: "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3:17).
 3. Jesus has provided light to those dwelling in the region & shadow of death.
 - a. Before Jesus, death was viewed as a shadowy, dark realm where there was no light whatsoever (Job 10:20-22).
 - b. Yet, the Lord Jesus has revealed death quite differently. For example, in speaking of the rich man & Lazarus, Jesus revealed the realm of the dead righteous as a place of comfort (Lk 16:25).
 - c. It is Jesus who has removed the fear of death: Heb 2:15.
 4. A preacher was driving with his children to his wife's funeral where he was to preach the sermon.
 - a. They came to a red light & in front of them was a huge truck.
 - b. The sun was shining on it at just the right angle that the truck's shadow spread out across the snow on the field beside it.
 - 1) The preacher said, "Look children at that truck, and look at its shadow. If you had to be run over, which would you rather be run over by? Would you rather be run over by the truck or the shadow?"
 - 2) The youngest child said, "The shadow couldn't hurt anybody."

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- 3) “That’s right,” the preacher continued, “and death is a truck, but the shadow is all that ever touches the Christian. The truth ran over the Lord Jesus. Only the shadow is gone over Mother.”
5. But, that is only the case because Jesus is a MULTINATIONAL LIGHT—a light to Jews **and** Gentiles.

IV. A MISSIONAL LIGHT, v 17.

- A. Jesus was a light on a mission
 1. You don’t turn the lights on in your home for just any cause, but you have a purpose—a mission—you want the light to perform: to light a room so that you can see in that room.
 2. Jesus was on a mission: “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”
- B. In his mission, Jesus calls people to repentance.
 1. There is a great need for repentance:
 - a. Without repentance, we shall perish: Lk 13:3.
 - b. As we have said before, repentance leads one to a new life. Jesus is calling those in Capernaum to a new life in him.
 2. The need for repentance is that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
 - a. We have often equated the kingdom **precisely** with the church.
 - 1) Equating the church & the kingdom is wise, for Scripture does make that connection.
 - a) In the Gospels, the kingdom is spoken of as future: e.g., Mk 9:1.
 - b) After Pentecost, the kingdom is spoken of as a present reality.
 - i. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter speaks of Jesus being a king (Acts 2:30-31). In being resurrected, Jesus sat down on the throne of David; in other words, he was enthroned as a king. You can’t have a king without a kingdom.
 - ii. Col 1:13.
 - 2) However, I believe there is an important distinction between the church & the kingdom.
 - b. The church is a **physical** reality, while the kingdom is a **spiritual** reality.
 - 1) The kingdom of God refers to the reign of God: Rv 11:15.
 - 2) Thus, being a part of God’s kingdom means that I allow God to reign in my life, that I allow him to be my Sovereign, & that I make him first.
 - a) I have no doubt but that everywhere the church meets this morning, there are people who have their names on the “church roll,” but aren’t part of the kingdom.
 - i. These people might attend every church service, they might teach class, and they might serve in a variety of ways.
 - ii. Yet, they are not really a part of either the church or the kingdom, for God does not reign in their lives.
 - b) Let me give you an illustration.
 - i. Simon Cowell is a citizen of the United Kingdom.
 - ii. But, if he fails to obey the laws that Queen Elizabeth has given her consent to, he isn’t allowing her to reign in his life.
 - c) Yes, I know that’s a far from perfect illustration, but it does demonstrate that in a kingdom that King or Queen reigns.
 - 3) Are you this morning allowing the Lord of the Universe to reign in your life?