

**Matthew 4:12-23.**

*<sup>12</sup> When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. <sup>13</sup> Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— <sup>14</sup> to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: <sup>15</sup> “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— <sup>16</sup> the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” <sup>17</sup> From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” <sup>18</sup> As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” <sup>20</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him. <sup>21</sup> Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, <sup>22</sup> and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. <sup>23</sup> Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.*

**Jesus is the Light of our World**

- 1. He calls us out of the darkness.**
- 2. He calls us to follow him.**

To winter-weary souls it might sound like an inviting description that came straight out of an old travel book about some warm land along the sea: ***“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.”*** But as one looks deeper into the meaning of this statement and the history of this region, a person quickly realizes that Isaiah does not speak of this as a glamorous location or vacation destination. No, this was a place that had seen its share of pain and sorrow. It was a worn out pathway to the sea that had been scarred by war. It had been trampled on, as armies made their way through this narrow corridor on their way to fry bigger fish. Time after time enemies from the north would trample upon the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, as they headed toward the Great Mediterranean Sea or marched on toward Jerusalem. Time and time again the news was proclaimed in this northern region of Israel that war was coming. This land of Zebulun and Naphtali had seen its share of pain, of war, of death and darkness.

And the people that lived there were both a sign and a result of that darkness. At the time of Christ the people of Galilee were to a large extent of mixed race. Some could trace their heritage back to the Canaanites who had not been driven out when Israel first occupied the land. Others had been placed and displaced after other battles and

invasions. Later in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC the Assyrians had taken many Galileans into captivity and had replaced them with their own people and other Gentiles. While there were some Jews living in this region it was mostly a place inhabited with Gentiles who knew nothing of the God of Israel. As for the Jews that were living in this area the darkness of ignorance and unbelief that surrounded them affected their faith. The God of Israel was known, only by some, and not very well. Most people living in this land did not know the true way of salvation. They were living in the darkness of sin and unbelief, ignorance and wickedness.

But then Jesus, the light of the world, stepped into this darkness. The land which had been trampled time and time again, the land that served as the door mat to the Mediterranean and the corridor of war against the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, now was the place that the Son of God and the Savior of the world would call home. And this messenger of God did not come to announce another invasion by some foreign army. This herald, this bringer of good news, did not come to announce nations at war but peace between God and man. He came to announce that the kingdom of heaven had come.

The people living in the shadows of death, in the darkness of ignorance and unbelief and in some cases open idolatry and pagan worship would have the privilege to have the Son of God bring them the light of salvation. He would preach the gospel. He would share the good news with them; the good news that they so desperately needed to hear for not only had this land been trampled by foreign armies, but hearts and souls had been trampled by sin and Satan, death and hell. The light of Christ would pour upon those hearts and souls lost and searching for answers. Jesus came to them and proclaimed the good news that the kingdom of heaven had come.

Jesus had come to set these people free from the rule of Satan and from the dark shadows of unbelief. The Jews who were waiting for the Messiah no longer had to wait. The Gentiles blind and dead lost in unbelief and ignorance and a life dictated by sin and devoted to the desires of the flesh were brought into the knowledge of God's one and only Son and were given life and freedom through Jesus.

Where the dark shadows of guilt and fear reigned Jesus came with the good news of forgiveness and peace. Where hopelessness and defeat ruled, now Jesus came with his kingdom of hope and joy and victory. This great light of Christ Jesus pierced the darkness of this place. Jesus is the wonderful light that shines in the darkness!

What mercy and grace that the Savior would come to this place! This is the great light of Jesus that has illumined our hearts and minds. He has come and he has brought to us security and peace with God. He came and brought the sure hope of heaven so that would have light and peace even in when we live and walk under the shadow of death. Whether it is the death of loved one or as when we face the reality of our own mortality Jesus is light that drives away our fears. He gives us answers and guides our lives. He gives us peace and comfort and security even as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

Today we rejoice that God would give us his light. We may not know what it feels like to live in a land scarred by war and humbled by defeat. But we do know what it feels

like to live in a nation that has this great mix of people looking for answers and for comfort. We know what it is to live in a place where many are groping in the darkness of this world looking for help and direction in all the wrong places. But, thanks be to Jesus Christ that in his Word he gives us answers that we need, answers for which we were searching. In his Word our Lord tells us how we were made and where we came from and where we are going. In his word he tells us that each one of us is precious to our God. Our lives have purpose and meaning in him. He tells us that we are loved by our Heavenly Father. Our Savior tells us the good news that our sins have been paid for and when a person dies in faith we have the gift of heaven through Jesus' death and resurrection. In this world of darkness with so many searching aimlessly for answers, we have answers! We have Jesus! We have light!

This is good news for us who have hearts and souls made weary by sin and sin's cold darkness. Most of us do not know what it is like to live in a place that was often trampled by the feet of soldiers and foreign armies, but we do know what it feels like to have hearts trampled by guilt. We know how it is to fall prey to the dark and shameful things of this world. We know what it feels like to feel defeated by temptation. We know this darkness of sin too well for we are sinners living in a sinful world. But in walks Jesus. He steps into our life even without our invitation. He throws out his net of word and sacrament and he gathers us to himself. He announces the good news and applies it to our hearts. For where Jesus is, where his word is proclaimed the kingdom of heaven has come. And through faith he has given us the blessings of being in this kingdom. And so now the Lord Jesus rules our hearts. He rules and gives his people safety and security and peace. His Word assures us that although we are sinners we are loved and cared for by a God whose grace is boundless and whose mercies endure forever. These are the blessings that abound in his kingdom and his kingdom has come. Now he calls us to follow him.

Notice how quickly Andrew and Peter, James and John left everything to follow Jesus. They knew that Jesus was the Christ. They knew he was the one that God had sent. They knew that he stood out and was different and worthy of their full devotion. They had seen that he was this special light in this dark world and they wanted to follow him. They put following him first in their life; before their work and even their family. They followed this marvelous light.

Jesus is the light that rescues us from darkness. But, oh, how hesitant we can be to follow. How hesitant we can be to give him our full devotion! Even though we know our Savior, we know that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life; we fail to follow the light of his ways whole heartedly. We act one way at work and a different way at church. We put on a good face before church friends and different attitude when we are with others or by ourselves. Instead of living in the light of Christ we gravitate to sin, we are drawn to the darkness. And so our Savior continues to reach out to us with his call of repentance. ***“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near. The kingdom of heaven has come.”***

As children of God, as those who have been given the light of Christ, as those who have been rescued from the gloomy dungeons of sin and death and have been given the kingdom of heaven, we need to remember that the difference between following Jesus or

following the ways of this world is the difference between night and day; between darkness and light. We are no longer children of darkness. We are no longer doomed to spend our lives living in an empty way. Sure, our sinful nature is drawn to this darkness; sure, the world tries to seduce us back into its darkness; but nothing good is found there. A life of sin, even toying with the dark deeds disobedience; this is no way for a child of God to live. Jesus has called us out from the darkness and ignorance of unbelief. He has saved us from eternal death and an empty existence of stumbling around in the darkness of this world. He has brought us into his light. He brings us out of wickedness and evil. He warms our heart with his love and illuminates our path. He has given us answers. He has given us purpose and clarity and direction. Our Savior in his love and through his word directs our life and he leads us to what is good. He shows us and teaches us how we should live. This is his blessed invitation to you and to me. Jesus says, ***“Come, follow me.”*** Let us walk and live our whole life in his light.

In his kingdom of grace Jesus enables his people to live in freedom and joy. In this kingdom of light Jesus calls his people to serve and he enables his people to do great things. These first disciples were ordinary men, uneducated fisherman, but he would use these men to do great things. He used them to catch souls for God. Notice how Jesus says, ***“I will make you fishers of men.”*** He would train them. Jesus would show them the way. Jesus would nurture their faith and help them grow in their understanding of the Scriptures. Jesus would make use of the individual gifts of each man and he would guide each one of these men to help spread the light of the good news to the world.

He uses us in such a way too. We have not *all* been called to be pastors, or missionaries, or fishers of men, but we have all been called to serve our Lord. We have all been called to be ambassadors for Christ. We have been called to be citizens of God’s eternal kingdom who represent the LORD Jesus in this life here on this earth. We have been called to represent him and to shine as his light in the darkness of this world. The Light of the World in turn calls us to serve as his light that continues to shine.

You may not be perfect. You may not be specially trained to follow and serve Jesus. But you have the gift of faith you have the Spirit of God dwelling in you, you have the light of Christ. And taught and guided by your Savior you will grow. In the light of his love, as his kingdom comes to you through word and sacrament you will grow in your understanding and your ability to serve; for Jesus will teach you. He will teach you to serve him. He will teach you to resist the darkness of sin and live for him. He will forgive and restore you when you stumble. He will use you, your different abilities, your unique personality and your place in life, so that your life will shine with the light of his love.

Dear friends Jesus is the light of the world. To hearts and souls made weary by the bitter darkness of sin we have been given this good news of salvation. We have been given light of Christ. He has come to those trampled by the darkness of sin and temptation, fear and death, and he has delivered the good news that we have been saved by his grace. Jesus has rescued us from darkness and he has called us to a life of joyful service. Come, let us follow Jesus. Come; let us live in his light. Come; let us share that light with others. Amen.