

ESF, Lord's day sermon
10/2/2016

Jesus, the Light
Matthew 4:12-17

¹² *When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— ¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:*

¹⁵ *“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—*

¹⁶ *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.”*

¹⁷ *From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”*

Light is an essential element to sustain our lives. There is a physical disorder caused by the lack of light. This is called seasonal affective disorder (SAD). There is a chemical in man's brain which is called “serotonin.” Serotonin controls the mood of a person. During the fall and winter months when daylight hours are shorter, less light shines on our bodies. This reduces the release of serotonin. When serotonin is not released in sufficient quantities, the symptoms of depression may occur.

Just as we need physical light, we also need light for our minds and spirits. In today's text, Jesus begins his ministry at a place where people were living in darkness. By His ministry Jesus brings light to them. Jesus has come to bring us light. Let's see what the light of Jesus is and what blessings we can receive through the light of Jesus.

The light fulfills God's promise

When Jesus came to the people of Capernaum who were by the Lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali, He began His ministry to fulfill God's promise. It was the promise given through the prophet Isaiah: *he went and*

lived in Capernaum, to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah ...the people living in darkness have seen a great light (verses 13-16).

The darkness in this text means the painful state of the life of man. It means all types of problems. It means fear, despair, hopelessness and disease. It means a life without meaning or purpose.

Spiritually speaking, people are living in a world of darkness. Some of you may recognize the words in the song of Simon and Garfunkel, "The sound of silence": "Hello darkness, my old friend, I've come to talk with you again." This may be a description of the way that many people feel today - that they are living in darkness.

People can do all kinds of things to overcome such darkness in life. They try to find a way to overcome the darkness through social revolution, religion, philosophy, education, politics, drugs, meditation, or other artificial inventions. However, they are still living in darkness.

The Bible proclaims that the light of Jesus overcomes the darkness. Jesus says in John 8:12 *... I am the light of the world; whoever follows me, will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:6, *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.*

In the life and ministry of Jesus in the New Testament, we can find evidence that Jesus fulfills God's promise regarding the light. By his ministry He drives out the darkness caused by sickness and fear of death. His preaching and teaching brings out the truth which exposes the lies of the devil. The truth guides people to the way of God's righteousness. His healing casts out demonic powers from the sick, and gives them new, healthy lives. Through His death on the cross, He has brought forgiveness of all our sins. Through His resurrection, He gives us power to overcome the fear of death which is the last enemy of all men.

We do not need to work hard or pay the price to get the light. We only need to believe that the promise of God's light is fulfilled through Jesus.

The light works for all people

The people in the land where Jesus went first were poor and lowly. They were looked down to by the Jews. By bringing God's light to them Jesus proves that the light would be not only for the Jews who have been God's chosen people for a long time, but also for all people in the world who have never been believers. The light of Jesus has come not only for the saints but also for sinners. The light of Jesus is available to all kinds of people regardless of their religion, social status, economic condition, or ethnic differences. Galatians 3:28-29 says: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

There may be people who think that they are hopeless because they are too lowly, too poor or too sinful. But if they accept Jesus as the light of God, the light brings them hope for a new life. Let's see a couple of cases in the gospel records that show well how the light of Jesus shines on all people.

In the story of a Samaritan woman in John chapter 4, we can see clearly that the light of Jesus transforms a hopeless sinner's life who was living in darkness. The woman had had five husbands and was living with a sixth husband. All the people in her town condemned her as a bad person. Although she had had six husbands, she was still not satisfied with the sixth husband. She was living in darkness of shame, guilt, hopelessness and thirst of soul. She was afraid of encountering people in public places. So, she came out to draw water in the hot midday sun when she wouldn't meet anybody. Nobody could get her out of such darkness. But Jesus came to her town and met her personally and opened her spiritual eyes. Jesus led her to God's forgiveness, freedom from guilt and satisfaction of life. And she was liberated from the darkness of guilt and endless thirst. The fear of people was gone. An unspeakable joy came into her heart. So she ran into town and called the people without fear to come to Jesus. She witnessed to them about the light of God she had received through Jesus.

In the story of Zacchaeus in Luke chapter 19, we also can see a typical case of

how the light of Jesus can be available to all people. He was a tax collector. In his time, people regarded a tax collector as one of the worst sinners. All the people in his village kept a distance from him. He was living in the darkness of condemnation and rejection from the people.

He had heard that Jesus brought hope to the hopeless, and God's forgiveness to the sinners. One day Jesus was passing by his town. He wanted to see Jesus. He climbed up on a tree to see Jesus passing by. He did not expect that Jesus would meet him personally. But surprisingly, Jesus called him by his name and stayed at his house that day. At this moment, light came into Zacchaeus' heart. The grace of forgiveness came into his heart. He was set free from his heavy guilt at once. And unspeakable joy came into his heart. He became a new person. So he expressed his joy by saying to Jesus, *Look Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times of the amount* (Luke 19: 8). These were the blessings he received from the light of Jesus.

No matter what kind of life you have lived, Jesus' light is available to you. Just recognize that Jesus is the light and accept Him as the light.

The light will shine forever

Jesus says that His light isn't a temporary light, but an eternal flame. It is the light that will never go out. It is the light that will shine forever. And in the light, there will be no more darkness.

Since Jesus came into this world 2000 years ago, claiming to be the light of God and the light of the world, countless people have attempted to nullify the claim by killing Him and persecuting and killing His followers. But nobody has ever been able to destroy the light. The more severely people try to put out the light, the more powerfully the flame of the light spreads.

People can kill believers but they can't kill the light of Jesus in them. People can destroy believers' bodies, but they can't put out the light in their souls.

So, if we live in the light that shines eternally, we can live with hope that will never be shaken in any circumstance.

Dr. Alexander Popaderos, a famous Greek philosopher, used to teach an ethics class for two weeks every summer on the island of Crete. And in this particular summer just as he was getting ready to close the class, he said, "Now are there any questions before we go?" And just as he was getting ready to say, "OK then you're dismissed," a timid looking man in the back of the room, raised his hand and said, "Dr. Popaderos," "Yes" "I have a question" "Yes, what is it?" He said, "I'd like to know, what is the meaning of life?"

Dr. Popaderos very quickly quieted the group and said, "You know, if you don't mind I'd like to answer that question." He reached into his back pocket, and took out his wallet. He took out a little mirror about the size of a fifty-cent piece, honed down on the edges, and kind of sparkling. And then he told the tale and said, "When I was a child, I began to realize that I could have so much fun with that mirror. I would simply catch the glitter of the Sun, and shine that mirror into an otherwise darkened place. As I grew older I began to learn that this is no child's toy. This is really a metaphor for my life. Now I am not the light—I am not the source of the light. I am simply a broken mirror fragment. But if I allow the sun to shine on my mirror fragment, it is amazing what light I can bring into darkness." Then he said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, that is the meaning of life."

Each of us is a mirror fragment. We are not the Light. We are not the source of the Light. We are simply a broken mirror fragment. But when we permit the light of Jesus to shine on our mirror fragment, and then bounce it off into the life of a darkened heart, there can be illumination, there can be change.

A young Christian girl had just got her first job after finishing school. She realized at her first day of work that she was completely unprepared for the things she heard and saw. The language shocked her, and the lifestyles sickened her. In great despair she went home and told her Christian parents that she was not going back. She just could not put up with that kind of sin. In the middle of her complaining her father asked, "Where do you place lights?" She shrugged the question off. What could that have to do with her problem? She continued telling them all about the horror stories, and again her father interrupted. "Where do you place lights?" "Dad, what do you mean? You know that you place lights where it is dark." "Exactly" said her father.

As a Christian you are a light and you must be placed in dark places. The light of Jesus isn't just for the noonday sun, but it is for the midnight hour. Jesus doesn't just shine on your good days, but Jesus will also shine on your bad days. The harder the times are, the greater He shines. No matter how great the darkness is, this light will overpower it, and conquer it. No matter how hard the test, no matter how heavy the load, the light will carry you, you will run and not be weary, you will walk and not faint.

Maybe today you only see darkness in this world, look to the light and you will see the glory of heaven. Don't let the darkness rule over you. Let the light come into your heart and let the light bring you the power that drives out the darkness from your life. Go to work tomorrow and let your light shine before those godless men and women so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.