

The Great Light Dawns

(Jesus Begins His Messianic Ministry)

Matthew 4:12-25

Key Verse: 4:16

“...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.”

In this passage Jesus begins his messianic ministry in Galilee. Matthew describes Jesus' ministry in the words of Isaiah the prophet as the dawning of a great light. Wherever Jesus is, the light of his presence drives out darkness and brings the dawn of a new day. Many of us are wrestling in darkness in one way or another. But when we accept Jesus, the great light, we can have the dawn of a new day.

Before mentioning anything Jesus did, Matthew told us in chapters 1-2, who Jesus is. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary in fulfillment of prophecy. Jesus is in very nature God-Immanuel: God with us--and the King sent by God who would save his people from their sins. Jesus spent his childhood in Nazareth in fulfillment of the Scriptures. At about the age of 30 (Lk 3:23), he was baptized by John to signal his willing obedience to God as the promised Messiah. He received the Holy Spirit and God's word of approval. Jesus held this word in his heart and overcame the devil's temptations. The devil was completely defeated. Jesus was already a victor over the devil before his public ministry began. With this in mind, let's see how Jesus began his public ministry. We will study this passage in three parts: Jesus begins to preach (12-17), Jesus calls the first disciples (18-22), and Jesus heals every disease and sickness (23-25).

I. Jesus begins to preach (12-17)

First, Jesus challenged the darkness (12). Look at verse 12. **“When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee.”** John had lived a pure life dedicated to preparing the way for the Messiah. Yet John was put in prison. It was not because he had committed a crime, but for rebuking King Herod's sin of adultery (Mt 14). Herod abused his power and suppressed the truth in his wickedness. When we see leaders behave in such a way, we feel that the world is utterly corrupt. Recently, the former governor of California and the former IMF chief both revealed this kind of behavior. When we hear of this, it is easy to despair and lose vision to

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improve the world. It is easy to resign ourselves, as Thoreau said, to “lead lives of quiet desperation.” At best, we care for our families. Often people seek to escape reality through drug and alcohol abuse, and indulgence in entertainment. One famous pastor described Americans as those living in aimless distractions. But Jesus was different. Jesus saw through the overt wickedness to God’s greater purpose. To Jesus, John’s imprisonment signaled the time to begin his ministry. Jesus withdrew to Galilee, not to avoid Herod, but to begin his public ministry in the very territory governed by Herod. To Jesus, God Almighty was ruling to accomplish his salvation plan and nothing could stop it. Jesus went to Galilee ready to give his life for God’s purpose. When we see Jesus, we must repent of inner despair that so easily paralyzes us. Instead of looking at wicked people, we must fix our eyes on Jesus to see God’s opportunity in seemingly dark times. To do this, we must read the Bible and pray more than we pay attention to worldly news.

Second, Jesus carried out his decision according to God’s word (13-14).

Verse 13 begins with the words, “Leaving Nazareth....” This is where Jesus had grown up, where his family lived. It is where Jesus had studied at the synagogue, celebrated feasts and weddings with neighbors, worked at carpentry, and perhaps played basketball. But now his private life was over. It was time to begin his public ministry. Jesus must have hugged his mother one last time, and thanked God for his happy life in Nazareth, as he made his way out of the city. Jesus knows what it is like to leave everything behind and begin a life of total service to God because he experienced it as a man. His decision to devote himself to God’s mission, which was general at the time of baptism, began to crystallize in practical obedience.

Jesus first moved to Capernaum, which was by the lake. This would become the headquarters of his ministry. Why did he go there? It was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah that indicated his ministry would be carried out in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. Nazareth was squarely in the land of Zebulun. Capernaum was on the border of Zebulun and Naphtali. So Jesus moved there. Jesus was led by the word of God. Jesus lived by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Jesus’ Messianic ministry was precisely his obedience to the Father God.

When we see Jesus, we can learn the mind and heart of our Father God. It was God who promised, prophesied and sent Jesus into the world.

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John 3:16 says, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** God loves the world he made and is committed to saving people. God does this by his grace, for his own purpose and glory. God made his plan before the creation of the world, prophesied it, and carried it out precisely. Peter says that Jesus was **“chosen before the creation of the world”** (1 Pe 1:20). Paul says that God chose us in Christ **“before the creation of the world”** (Eph 1:4). This tells us that God Almighty reigns through Jesus Christ to save his people without fail. Though distressing things happen, God’s purpose for salvation prevails. We can be sure of this, amidst any kinds of trials. This gives us peace and the assurance that everything is going to be all right.

Third, Jesus’ great light shone through his preaching ministry (15-17).

Verse 16 foretells what would happen as a result of Jesus’ ministry. It says: **“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.”** The people of Galilee were living in darkness. This means spiritual darkness. Historically, the land had been invaded by Assyrians as a punishment for Israel’s sin of idol worship (2 Ki 15:29). Galilee had become a land of religious pluralism—with many different gods and many beliefs—and people were oppressed politically as well as spiritually. Galileans blamed the Romans, the religious leaders and the tax collectors. But the root problem was idolatry that produced godlessness. Romans 1:21 says, **“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”** However, upon the people living in darkness, Jesus’ light began to shine brightly.

America today is in a spiritual darkness. Not long ago, Ann Graham Lotz, Dr. Billy Graham’s daughter, was asked how God could let the terrorist attacks of 9-11 take place. She said, “I believe God is deeply saddened by this, just as we are, but for years we’ve been telling God to get out of our schools, to get out of our government and to get out of our lives. And being the gentleman He is, I believe He has calmly backed out. How can we expect God to give us His blessing and His protection if we demand He leave us alone?” The problems we face at this moment seem insurmountable. We are involved in two or three wars, and the ongoing war on terror. Unchecked greed and widespread corruption threaten to ruin our

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economy. According to the U.S. Debt Clock, our national debt exceeds \$14 trillion, that is, \$46 thousand for every person in the United States. More than 23 million people are unemployed. The financial pressure is pushing families to the breaking point. We have the problems of gang violence and drug trafficking. Flooding and tornadoes have left many homeless. People simply cannot face this reality. They are fearful and desperate. They look for political, military, or economic answers. But this misses the mark. Our root problem is idolatry that produces godlessness. We have put money and pleasure in the place of God and fallen into darkness. But to us Americans living in the darkness, God has sent his great light to shine on us and deliver us. He is Jesus Christ.

How did Jesus begin to shine his light into the dark world? Look at verse 17. **“From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’”** Jesus called people to repent-to turn away from their sins, problems and themselves, and to turn to God. When we do this, Jesus comes into our hearts to reign. Jesus is Almighty God. He is full of compassion and abounding in love. Jesus restores us to God as his dear children. When we are right with God, he gives us wisdom to find the way of salvation; he fills our hearts with love and renews divine compassion within us; he strengthens us to go through hardships and trials in such a way that they actually refine our faith and Christian character; he provides for us with generous bounty, and leads us to victory. He gives us real peace and joy and security. Jesus turns our darkness into light, our curse into blessing, our hell into paradise. So instead of struggling with unsolvable problems, we should invite Jesus to come and reign in our hearts. Then each day can be the dawn of a new day. We can walk in his heavenly sunlight all of our days until we finally enter his glorious kingdom, where Jesus’ light shines so brightly that we do not need the sun.

There is a woman among us whom Jesus’ light is shining through. Not long ago, she suddenly became a single mother with five sons. In that difficult time, she came to God in faith, trusting Jesus’ grace. Most characteristically, she struggled with God’s word. For example, last year, as one of the Daily Bread writers, she wrote more than 60 portions for publication. Over the last few years, through a series of miracles she became a successful school teacher who supported and raised her sons, while continuing to participate in campus mission. Her sons are growing in God, following her footsteps of faith. In the past, when we had a guest speaker,

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she was the first one to ask a question. But this time, her son Moses rose up in her place. I have been told that Moses did not miss Daily Bread even once during his entire second semester at UIC. Another son, David, gave glory to God through his recent victory in track. As she allowed Jesus to reign as King, he has turned her adverse situation into a time of God's grace and victory.

As Christ reigns in us personally, his reign extends to our community as well. He creates among us a loving fellowship that reveals his presence to the world. In the early 18th century, those who would come to be known as "The Moravians" began to gather from all over Europe on the estate of Count Zinzendorf. They were from different backgrounds and denominations. At first, they fought a lot over doctrinal differences. But they realized that Jesus called them to repent their sins and to love one another. One Sunday evening in August of 1727, as they had communion together, the Holy Spirit poured out on them a blessing that transformed their community. They began to love one another dearly and pray together. They formed a 24-7 prayer chain that lasted for over 100 years. They began to obey the world mission command and go to the nations as missionaries. Their Christian community was a powerful influence of change that revealed the kingdom of heaven in our world.

Jesus solves our root problem, our sin problem, and transforms people and communities into places where God reigns. Jesus does this through his message of repentance and the kingdom of heaven. So the most urgent need of America is for Bible teachers who can reveal the light of Jesus in a dark world. This requires not only sharing the right message, but having a heart full of hope that comes from personal experience with Jesus. God has used UBF to raise these kinds of Bible teachers in America. And he continues to do so as we pray and engage in ministry on all of the campuses in the Chicago area. Now is not the time to shrink back because of the world's darkness. It is time to advance with the word of God. To do so, we must look to Jesus and pray all the more to raise Bible teachers and shepherds in America, especially for young college students.

II. Jesus calls his first disciples (18-22)

Jesus himself did not waste any time in starting his disciple raising program. It happened concurrently with the beginning of his preaching

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ministry. In verses 18-22 Jesus called two sets of brothers: Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, and James and his brother John. John's gospel indicates that Andrew and John had been disciples of John the Baptist. They accepted John's testimony that Jesus was the Lamb of God while John was baptizing at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan River (Jn 1:28). When Jesus called them, they were not strangers. They knew Jesus and they were prepared to make a decision to follow him. We can learn several things here.

First, Jesus called ordinary people. Both sets of brothers were fishermen. At that time, this was a common occupation for working class people. It might be compared to working in a factory in our times. It is notable that Jesus called men who already had jobs and were hard at work; he did not scour the unemployment lines to find disciples. Furthermore, Jesus did not call the religious leaders, who had a privileged education, a polished manner, and an impressive pedigree. But he called ordinary working class men. Why? It is the character of God. **God calls the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and the weak things of the world to shame the strong** (1 Cor 1:27).

Second, Jesus called them to a relationship with him. The essence of Jesus' calling was, **"Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people"** (19). Jesus was inviting them to spend time with him in daily life and to get to know him. It was a special privilege to know the Son of God personally during the three short years he ministered publicly. This invitation was not given to everyone, but to those whom he chose. Inherent in the words "follow me" are the invitation to learn of him and to be like him. Jesus made himself lowly and plain so that they might know him and in knowing him, come to know God and become the children of God. It was nothing but his one-sided grace.

Third, Jesus gave them new vision and a new hope. Jesus had a great vision that these ordinary men would learn of him, become like him, and carry on his ministry after him. He saw them becoming spiritual leaders who could help people living in darkness open their spiritual eyes to the light of Jesus' life. He saw them influencing many people and winning them over to Christ and his kingdom. It was not because they were great, but because he would be with them to help them and train them until they could accomplish his great vision for them.

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Fourth, they made immediate decisions to follow him. Peter and Andrew left their nets to follow Jesus. James and John left the boat and their father to follow Jesus. They grasped the nature of Jesus' calling. They realized it was God's deep grace to them and an invitation to blessing that they did not want to miss. They left their jobs and their routine family life behind and embarked on the adventure of following Jesus wherever he went. This obedience came from their faith. They trusted Jesus, the person, and joyfully followed him with great expectations.

III. Jesus heals the sick (23-25)

This part tells us about Jesus' healing ministry. Jesus healed every disease and sickness among the people. Some very good doctors can heal diseases. But no doctor can heal them all. There are many diseases that have no cure, such as many kinds of cancer and AIDS. But Jesus healed them all without missing even one. Jesus' power to heal reveals that he is God. As people heard about him, they brought all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them (24). Jesus healed people's bodies, their minds and their spirits. Jesus healed minor illnesses and chronic paralysis. Jesus' concern for the practical lives of people shows his compassion. Jesus wants to touch the hurts that bother people in their daily lives. Jesus' spread his kingdom by touching people with his love very practically. Jesus' message was focused on man's relationship with God. Most of all, Jesus wanted to change man's eternal destiny from hell to heaven. But Jesus' healing ministry brought the experience of the kingdom to earth in a tangible way. People felt the love of God as Jesus touched their sicknesses and made them well.

Sometimes, when we think of healing ministry, we picture it in terms of a sensational, spiritually gifted healer, who does dramatic healings. It is true that there are such people. However, Jesus' healing ministry is not limited to such expressions. Jesus has healed many people quietly, through the prayers of many coworkers. Moreover, some of Jesus' greatest healing miracles are spiritual in nature. Jesus restores a person damaged by sin into the glorious image of God. Selfish people have become sacrificial people; greedy people have become generous people; fearful people have become courageous servants of God; bitter people have become thankful people; mean people have become loving people, and so on. We should not think we

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cannot engage in healing because we don't have the gift of healing. It is Jesus who heals. When we pray, Jesus can heal those who are sick. Jesus' healing ministry can transform any community into one that shadows the kingdom of heaven on earth.

In response to Jesus' ministry, people from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan began to follow Jesus. Jesus' ministry transformed Galilee from a place of darkness to a place of light; from a place of despair to one of hope. It became a place of divine love where miracles happened and people could find new life. It is simply because Jesus carried out his ministry in Galilee. Jesus is indeed the Great Light who shines into the dark world to produce a complete change wherever he goes. When Jesus dwells in our hearts, his presence will transform our homes, our campuses, our nation into the beautiful kingdom of heaven.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Jesus still carries out his great work through the faith of his people. Let's repent and believe the good news of the kingdom and share his message with those living in darkness. The darkest time is just before the dawn. Now is the time to shine the light of Jesus into our world.