

Let Us Be Light (Matthew 4:12-17)

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[0 : 00] Okay, can we all turn to Matthew chapter 4, verse 12 to 17? Okay.

If we've got it, can we all read it together? When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee, leaving Nazareth.

He went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Sabalind and Naphtali, to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah, land of Sabalind and land of Naphtali, the way of the sea beyond of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

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. From that time on, Jesus began to preach, repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.

So that was the passage. And so these verses take us back in history, back in the days when Jesus was in his 30s, and he began his public ministry.

[1 : 18] And I think it is a remarkable point in Jesus' life. And it is necessary for us not to skim through it, but to actually take some time to ponder upon its significance.

And so in the following time, we'll be exploring two key ideas of the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and look at how it actually affects the way we do ministry today.

So if we were to look at it like a musical theater or a play, you would see John the Baptist.

He was on stage the whole time. He was doing amazing things. He was preaching. He was baptizing people. But then here comes a twist. John is now arrested, and he is put into prison by Herod Antipas.

And if you know how the story goes, you will know that the fact that John is arrested actually foreshadows something crucial that is about to happen later on in the story.

[2 : 30] But in here, the absence of John actually indicates where we are in the story. So his disappearance from the spotlight implies that the promised messianic age has begun.

So as important as John the Baptist sounds, we can put him aside for a second, because now we have another character walking towards the center of the stage.

The moment has finally begun, and it's finally arrived for Jesus, the promised Messiah, and he is about to stir into action. So when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee.

Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Sebulun and Naphtali, to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah.

So in here, we see a lot of actions going on in the scene. We see that Jesus withdrew. He left, and he went somewhere else, and he settled in a place.

[3 : 47] So the fact that Jesus withdrew to Galilee was actually quite shocking to people at that time, because for them, the expected Messiah would probably do most of his work in the capital city, Jerusalem.

But instead, Jesus did most of his ministry in Galilee, a place that was despised. And then we see Jesus went and lived in Capernaum, and it is a town on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. And by this point, you may wonder, how does all this information matter to me? Maybe at least for me, I ask that. Well, for Matthew, he's well convinced that Jesus' life is unfolding not according to random chance, but according to God's plan.

Therefore, the geographic information here is to inform us that Jesus' own presence is in this particular place. And of all these traveling, they were to fulfill what has been said by the prophet Isaiah.

So we can... This suggests that Jesus is mission-driven. He moves with obedience, with intentions, and with efficiency.

[5 : 13] So previously, we see that Jesus was baptized and received the Spirit of God in chapter 3. So we can make a claim that Jesus was indeed filled by the Holy Spirit, and he was led by the Spirit to make each of his move in ministry.

And he's intentional with his actions. He doesn't just randomly choose a place to settle, or he didn't just leave without any reason.

He enters the place of people that need him in order to fulfill the prophecy. And then he moves efficiently, because as soon as he heard that John was put into prison, he knew that it was time for him to leave, and he had to begin his ministry.

And so the first point we can make here is that the beginning of Jesus' ministry has a huge part of fulfilling the Scripture.

He is faithful with his promises, and he takes intentional actions to fulfill them. And later on, if we look deeper into the book of Matthew, we will see that each event, each miracle, each turning point in Jesus' life is to confirm that Jesus is the promised Messiah, and he has come to bring fulfillment for what has been promised in the Scripture.

[6 : 44] And so this is also why reading Old Testament can be very exciting, because all the prophecies, all the symbols, all the patterns, all point to what is, and what was, and is to come.

And you can ask Fran, she would know. Land of Sebaland, and a land of Naphtali, the way of the sea beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people living in darkness have seen a great light.

On those living the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. And so this, these two verses are referenced from the book of Isaiah, chapter 9, and here we have more geographic information, which I personally was not very interested.

But the more I read about it, I realized they actually indicate something crucial for us to understand. And so Galilee of the Gentiles point to the fact that many non-Israelites lived in the area, and the mixed population in Galilee actually caused the Jews in Jerusalem to look down on them.

[8 : 03] And, but however, the mentioning of Gentiles is actually an important theme in Matthew, because it anticipates that the gospel is now spreading beyond the boundaries of Judaism to all nations.

And so, for Matthew, it is important to mention that, you know, the Gentiles are now receiving the gospel, because the message of Jesus is meant for both Jews and Gentiles.

But, why do these people need the gospel? Because in here, it says that the people were living in darkness, and they were living in the land of the shadow of death.

Fancy. So, what is it like living in darkness? So, I really like the movie Alice in the Wonderland, especially the cartoon version.

And, the main character, Alice, she literally fell into a rabbit hole, which is a metaphor used when someone encounters a bizarre or confusing nonsense situation, or is placed in such an environment.

[9 : 21] And so, I would, I would kind of imagine that living in a dark, living in darkness, it's like falling into a rabbit hole. And so, this is what I call the, the 3D life.

Yeah. I love these images, like, it's so, okay. So, first, distractions. So, in the, in the, yay, lights to see more clear.

so, in the original context, the, the passage actually talks about the broken people that have suffered Syrian attacks and deportation.

And, Isaiah calls it a place of darkness because it was populated primarily by pagans. And, the few Jews remaining in, in the region actually find it hard to hold on to their faith.

And so, and, and adding on to that, the region was also cultivated by a lot of new teachings. And so, you can imagine how difficult it is for them to remain faithful in their belief and not get distracted by the external influences.

[10 : 32] And, of course, the more distractions you, you face, you would experience detour. So, um, the more distractions, um, are there, they start to find, they start to form blind spots in your life, um, which interrupts and shakes your foundation, the foundation of your faith.

And, let's say when God intends you to go from A to B, because of the distractions you have, you start to wander off and you go in circle and so, you go around in circle and you realize you're not going anywhere.

And, at first, it would only be detours that, that seems to not make a huge impact in your life. But then they all form into a pathway that leads to destruction.

And so, um, like the people mentioned in the passage, um, they were in darkness of sin and, and meaning that the darkness of the mind and the spirit.

and for us today, we are in a very distracted society. Um, so we call this secular humanism, basically, contemporary cultural shifts and norms that we all consciously or subconsciously conform to every day.

[11:52] Um, and then these distractions start to build up and we commit to these distractions and they become, they, they create detour in our lives, um, especially in our relationship with God and to a point where our lives are dominated by the forces of this world and we become comfortable and, in conforming to the patterns and norms of the current society.

But then this is exactly why Jesus came. When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

And that is exactly why, that is exactly why, um, Jesus came, um, entering and bringing light into the lives of darkness so that they can walk out of darkness and live in the truth.

And here's one of the quotes that I found.

The light shines upon those sitting in the shadow of death even when they were not looking for it.

And I think a lot of us can relate to that. Um, that is the love of God that even though we might not be seeking for him but he is already seeking after us and we are all the lost sheep that God would chase after.

[13:19] However, there are also people that just don't believe that. And here's one of the quotes by Stephen Hawking in one of his interviews. And he said that heaven is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.

And I don't know if you would agree with this um, or not. But I think thinking from their perspective and especially for someone that is so, that was so intelligent and wise, obviously he would have thought through a lot of things and has come up with this conclusion.

And I think one of the reasons why is that because we we actually like being in darkness, we don't want to be seen, we don't want to be exposed, we don't like it when people confront us of our wrongs, and we don't like it when the Holy Spirit convicts us to change.

And we're basically just comfortable in the dark. But I agree with this statement in a way where I think we are afraid of the dark as well.

I think as children of God, it is reasonable and appropriate for us to be scared of the dark. In fact, I think we should be scared of the dark. Not because darkness has more power than the God that we believe in, but because it wants us, it wants to consume us, it wants to fill up our hearts and souls.

[14:50] Like it says in Genesis 4-7, sin is crouching at your door, it desires to have you. And when you realize that darkness is not just a state, that you're in, it is actually an energy that wants to consume you, then what would be your response?

But we are grateful that Jesus has come. The spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me. Because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners. And Jesus knows who is in darkness, and what it is like to be in darkness. That is why he came, to be light, and to bring light into our lives. And so that is why the second point would be, Jesus' ministry is to deliver salvation to the Gentiles.

from that time on, Jesus began to preach, repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.

So Jesus actually began with the same emphasis as John the Baptist did. And here, Matthew actually gives us a summary of Jesus' message.

[16:18] Because the rest of the book actually unfolds an increasingly complete picture of the character of the kingdom of heaven, which is repent.

And so that is why we should not overlook the importance of this call to repentance. Because everything that comes after in Jesus' ministry actually follows from this message.

And so it is very exciting for me to think about how Jesus himself preached a lot of the times. And

so for me to be standing here in front of you guys sharing the word of God feels very exciting.

And I could imagine that if Jesus himself came to preach to you guys, he would have said the same thing. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.

And so why does repentance matter so much? repentance and faith are the constant daily rhythms of the Christian life, breathing in and breathing out.

[17 : 30] So as we know that the act of repentance is prompted by a deep sense of sorrow or regret for any past wrongdoing against God. God, just like it says in 2 Corinthians 7, 10, godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation without regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

And we all know that we commit to sin multiple times every day. We know we should repent, but a lot of the times we don't feel like repenting. and this is because the sins that we have committed have somewhat already become a pattern of our lives.

And so we have somewhat come to a place where we are already okay with that. And so we don't feel sorry for wrongdoings.

We don't feel sorry for the sins that we've committed. So instead of feeling bad about it, we like to justify them theologically. We say that, well, I was born a sinner, and therefore I have a sinful nature, therefore I sin.

So theologically it makes sense, but then it doesn't contribute to our response in repentance. And so that is why repentance is a huge theme in the kingdom of God.

[19 : 11] And that's why also in Matthew chapter 3 previously it says that we should produce fruit in keeping with repentance. You cannot produce fruit without having a heart of repentance.

A heart that seeks for forgiveness and purification from God. And that is why Jesus spent a lot of his time announcing the kingdom of God.

And so the call to repentance is very important because Jesus came to preach and announce this to the world. God is very important and so just as we had kind of went through the three main points of Jesus ministry, how does it look like to us in our current ministry today?

And so after this passage, we will see that Jesus calls his first disciples. disciples, and I think this is a beautiful image because the disciples are called to leave behind what were in their hands and to follow Jesus.

And so in the same way, we are all called to leave what is in our hands and to follow Jesus. And so for ministry, in the same way, we are also called to commit to our ministry.

[20 : 35] ministry. And so the first point I think that I think we can learn from Jesus' ministry is that we are to testify the scripture.

So Jesus himself came to bring fulfillment to the scripture. Therefore, we as witnesses are called to witness and to testify the scripture.

And so like here it says, there was a man sent from God whose name was John.

He came as a witness to testify concerning the light. So that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light.

I think in the same way, we are called to come as a witness to testify the light that we have received. received. And so we also have the power to be used by God so that through us people may believe.

[21 : 41] And so I also really like the quote that goes something like, you will be the only Bible that some people ever read. And I think it's really true because a lot of the times people will probably never come across the Bible physically.

And so your presence in their life and your actions and your interaction with them actually serve as the Bible, as the living word of God to them. And so how do you testify the scripture that you claim to believe and to live that out?

and also how often do we live according to the Bible?

Do we set boundaries in our lives or uphold certain values just because the Bible says so? Jesus was intentional with his directions.

He knew where he had to stay, when he had to leave because he was committed to the scripture. So are we committed to the scripture? Do we live according to our standards, to our own desires, following our own hearts for directions, and then we pick up the Bible, hoping that it will bring some confirmation to the way that we already live, but that's not how it goes because the Bible should come first, or God should come first.

[23 : 25] And then the second point is bring light to the lives in darkness. So we live in such a strange time in history, and there's no doubt that we are constantly being distracted, and, but fortunately we here know Jesus.

But how many people that you know don't know Jesus, but they are living in darkness? These people could be experiencing addiction, depression, broken relationships, bullying, peer pressure, domestic violence, anxiety, racism, emotional abuse, physical limitations, and the list goes on. And I believe that we all know someone, at least someone, that is living in darkness, and doesn't know Jesus yet. And so how do we as disciples, as the church, bring light into the lives that Jesus would come to seek for, and provide comfort and healing?

And then the third point is preaching the living word of God. So Jesus himself came to preach, and we have been given the authority to preach the living word of God.

And this reminds me of Ezekiel 37, the valley of dry bones, where God gives us the authority to speak life to the dry bones. And so are we using that?

[25 : 01] Are we using that gift? And do we fully trust that the living word of God is actually living, and is alive, and is active? And are we speaking life into people's lives with the word of God?

Are we praying with the word of God? Are we encouraging people with the word of God? And so I took this from the church next door, and even though the sign is not designed, I guess, it's just very simple, but somehow it really encouraged me, and it really reminded me of what being a disciple or being a Christian is all about.

Like, for us, I know a lot of us say that, oh, we spend the whole weekend at church, church, my life basically revolves around church, and I get that.

I mean, I like to do that too, because we all have similar values and worldviews. We go through similar struggles, and supposedly we find it easier to connect, I guess, but somehow we're just missing what the whole mission field that we're called to actually go into.

And so our ministry doesn't stop here, but our mission begins, well, not begins, continues, when we exit this building, entering the world of people that haven't heard of Jesus or received Jesus into their lives yet.

[26 : 49] And so this, I think this is just a beautiful example, a reminder that when we leave the building, we're actually entering the mission field that Jesus has called his disciples into, because we're called to go out and be sent out.

And so, yeah, just to recap the three points, because I believe that our ministry, the way that we do ministry today should be faithful to how Jesus did his ministry, and if it's completely different, then it's either our problem or Jesus' problem, and I believe that it's usually our problem.

And so, in our ministry, whether it's a church context or our own ministry context, are we testifying the scripture, are we bringing light to the lives in darkness, and are we preaching the living word of God?

And so, just a last discussion question for your groups, where is your current mission field, people, and if you can't think of a mission field in your life right now, maybe get your groups to pray together and ask God to review where is your mission field.

And it could be school, it could be your workplace, it could be your family, it could be anywhere, and I believe that it's not about the number of people. A field might not be like this group of people, but it could be this person that God has placed in your life, that you just believe that you are to, you know, Jesus.

[28 : 29] Yeah. So, yeah. So, that is me, and pray, I will continue to pray for you guys, and pray that we can, as a church, collectively bring light into the darkness, and testify the scripture, and preach the living word of God.