



3rd Sunday in the Season of Epiphany

January 29, 2017

Jesus Is the Best Light

Pastor Daniel Schroeder

Dear Friends in Christ,

Remember when you were visiting a relative's house, had to get up in the middle of the night and, and stubbed your toe while groping for a light switch? Darkness can be confusing. How about the time you were driving at night and had to check a map, but the dome light in the car was burned out? Darkness can be frustrating. Imagine walking up an Eastside Milwaukee street from the Marcus Center after a performance past some of those old big buildings with narrow alleys. Suddenly the power goes out in the whole neighborhood. Darkness can be scary. If only you had light in those situations. Light shows the way and ends frustration and fear.

The Bible writers used the contrast between darkness and light to picture the contrast between life without God and life with God, the contrast between the devil's dirty work and God's goodness, the contrast between sin and forgiveness. The darkness of sin causes confusion, frustration, and fear. But the light of God's forgiveness shows the way to heaven and ends frustration and fear. That's why the gospel writer Matthew is so happy to report that: **"Jesus Is the Best Light 1. Light that was foretold by the prophets; 2. Light that is for people in need; 3. Light that forms a part of our daily lives.**

1. Light that was foretold by the prophets

A. After describing the preparatory and pointed ministry of John the Baptizer, who prepared the way for the Lord by pointing, "Look! The Lamb of God!" (Jn 1:29), Matthew tells us that when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee (12). Jesus headed north away from the hotbed of hatred in the Jerusalem area to the territory where he grew up. Matthew then adds that, leaving Nazareth, Jesus went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali (13). Matthew wants us to note that this move was significant.

Everybody living in Israel with Matthew got it. Did you? To understand what Matthew was getting at, you have to know that 14 centuries before Jesus came on the scene, when the 12 tribes of Israel first occupied the land, each tribe got its own designated piece of real estate. The tribe of Judah got prime real estate down south. The tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali got the farm country and woods up north. The prophet Isaiah had foretold that the Savior would do most of his

Sermon Text

Matthew 4:12-23

When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— ¹⁴to 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—¹⁶the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."

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

¹⁸As 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.

¹⁹"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." ²⁰At once they left their nets and followed him.



preaching not in high and mighty Judah but up north in Zebulun and Naphtali (13). Why didn't the Israelites make the connection? Many of the Israelites let their Bibles collect dust. They didn't study those passages and didn't believe Jesus when he came proclaiming spiritual light. "How can he be the One? He is spending most of his time up north in Galilee and has only made a few visits to Jerusalem!"

B. So Matthew penned an important message for those Israelites and for us. "If you really want to know the truth, check your Bibles. You will see that Jesus is the One.

He spent most of his ministry up north in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali – *to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah (13,14). Fulfillment of a prophecy that took place centuries before the event is one of the best flares sent up from* the pages of Scripture and circling over Jesus' head, 'You've got the right Savior! He's the One!'"

C. Some of you might not see this as all that big a deal. "So what? You don't have to tell us that Jesus is the world's Savior. We already know that." But have you looked around lately? Have you listened to people and heard the cynicism and skepticism of millennials? Have you had your belief system challenged by people who buy into the idea that lies are the same as the truth? There are tons of folks all around you who actually believe that all religions lead to the same goal, when, in fact, that simply is not true. Do you realize that there are only two religions in the whole world? – the right one and all the wrong ones. Only the holy God in heaven above as he speaks to us through Scriptures gives us the way and the truth and the life. Anything contradictory to Scripture is a lie and leads to hell.

Now! Would you like a little more certainty that you are standing on solid ground? Would you like to be sure that you are personally on the right track – not to gloat, "I'm saved, and you're not," but to get on your knees in humble joy, "Thank you, Lord Jesus, for having mercy on my poor, pitiful soul"? Then look in your Bible, listen to Matthew and rejoice that Jesus is the One who proclaims the light of heaven. Have no doubts because this light was foretold by the prophets and fulfilled in our Lord Christ!

2, Light that is for people in need

A. The people living in northern Palestine in the centuries before Christ were at a distinct disadvantage. The fiercest enemies came from the north, so they were always the first to get hit. The people living in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali were always the first to get their towns burned, or the first to pay half their harvest in taxes to an enemy king, or the first to be subjected to forced labor. Oh the gloom, doom, and despair when an enemy army would swoop over the hills from the north.

But a far greater tragedy had taken place within their hearts. They had fallen prey to the lure of idolatry. Their unfaithfulness to the Lord clouded their hearts with spiritual darkness. They really needed spiritual light.

B. It happened. *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* (16). Jesus, the Light of the world, made his home up north in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. The people who deserved to be wiped out first had the Savior in their midst. The people who were lost in the darkness of sin could listen to him proclaim the light of heaven. In their towns he changed water into wine, healed a centurion's servant, healed a paralyzed man, raised Jairus' daughter from the dead, fed over 5,000 people, and preached about the Bread of life. He was right in their midst offering the light of forgiveness to all in need.

C. Flick a switch, push a button, even just walk past a sensor, and lights go on. It's hard to realize that we need light. But we do. What about that time you sat on the edge of your bed and hung your head, knowing that you'd have to face up to the hurt you caused? What about the mistake you made that was so stupid and so



wasteful that you couldn't focus on the task at hand? And what about all those good and kind things we should have done which we forgot about or ignored while God was making black marks in his book?

Thank God that Jesus proclaims the light of heaven. Thank God that Jesus lightens our burden of guilt. Thank God that Jesus brightens our day with the news that we are special in God's sight in spite of the shame we feel. Thank God that Jesus places the pure blood prints of his hands over our black marks. We need it.

3. Light that forms a part of our daily lives

A. Did you ever have a little child in your home who wanted the lights to be on when it was time to sleep? You open the bedroom door – not good enough. You plug in a night light – still not good enough. You turn on Christmas lights in the room to light it up – still it seems not good enough. It's almost like they want their eyes to be wide open and lit up if they're going to get any sleep.

There were plenty of opportunities for Israelites living up north in Galilee to hear Jesus preach. But sad to say many of them closed their eyes and plugged their ears. They liked his miracles. They ate the free food he made. But that's about it. They didn't like Jesus telling them that their hearts were in spiritual darkness. They stuck to their old ways of trying to get to heaven on their own. They kept their spiritual eyes squeezed shut.

B. So Matthew wrote down the Savior's theme, "**Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is near**" (17). In other words, "Take to heart the sad news about your hearts being darkened by sin. Then appreciate my message about the light of forgiveness. And don't just do that once. Do it every day, just like turning on the lights each day when you awake, because the light of my love will make a difference in your life.

Look what happened in Capernaum. ***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. 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.'*** ***At once they left their nets and followed him. 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, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him (18-22).*** Four fishermen had seen the Light. Peter and Andrew looked at each other and said, "Jesus has given our life new meaning. Let's give him our lives." And notice that Zebedee, the father of the other two boys, didn't shout, "Hey!

²¹Going 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, ²²and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

²³Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

Other Daily Lessons

Isaiah 8:19-9:2

1 John 2:3-11

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you gave your one and only Son to be the light of the world. Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and believed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Where do you think you two are going? Come back here, and pick up your nets!" No! He also understood what a huge difference Jesus' light means. It formed a part of his daily life also. Even though old Zebedee stayed with his boat, you can bet that he was also fishing for people. I imagine that every day people asked, "Where are your sons?" and he would smile and say, "Let me tell you. They are following the Son—light, that's S-O-N light. His light has brightened the path of their lives, and his light is making me smile. That light is also shining on you."

C. There are plenty of people convinced that no matter what goes on in Washington, Afganistan, and the Middle East, our nation is just fine because of what's going on with our outward prosperity. Maybe you are one of those people.

But maybe you have pulled your head out of the sand and seen the reality of the spiritual darkness that has crept into every nook and cranny of this country. Will there ever be any light amid this darkness? I know the answer. I'm looking at numerous shining faces right now. And I know why. It's not because you washed up and put on your Sunday best. It's because Jesus proclaimed light from heaven which brightens your every day and forms a part of your daily lives. You are God's lights shining in this world. Open your eyes. ***Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*** (Jn 1:29). Then open your eyes and see the opportunities that God gives for your and me to shine that light into the lives of others.

Concl. No matter what anyone tells you, spiritual darkness is no fun. Some people might try to fool you as they go about fooling themselves, "I've got night goggles. I'm just fine. I can find my own way in life. I made it this far, and if I need God's help, I'll let you know. Besides, as long as I claim to be spiritual, I'm enlightened." But sooner or later that fake light will fizzle and fade. Then the darkness of confusion and questions, frustration and fear will set in. You know what to do. Keep smiling with your light, and reflect Jesus' light from heaven. Pretty soon someone you never expect will say, "You've not only brightened my day, but I can see the path all the way to heaven!" Amen.

Amen.

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Please join us for worship each Sunday at 9:00 am. Bible Class and Sunday School meet at 10:30 am. To speak with the pastor or for more information you may call the church office at 209-551-0563.

You may also join us live Sunday mornings on the internet at www.stpetermodesto.org.

May the Lord richly bless you throughout the coming week.