

S e r m o n s   o n  
Matthew

Light Has Dawned  
*Matthew 4:12-17*

*With Study Questions*

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# Light Has Dawned

*Matthew 4:12-17*

Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. <sup>13</sup>And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup> that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

<sup>15</sup>“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,

By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles:

<sup>16</sup>The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,

And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death

Light has dawned.”

<sup>17</sup> From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:12-17).

## **Introduction**

Let us be reminded that since the law is what God commands of us and the gospel is what God provides for us, it only makes sense that the emphasis of the gospels would be the person and work of Christ over the work of men. The issue in the gospels is not (so much) what is right or wrong in terms of ethics.<sup>1</sup> The issue was, and is, who is Jesus? This issue is found in the question Jesus will ask later in this gospel.

### **Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am (Matthew 16:13)?**

Who Jesus is has very much been the topic of Matthew. His royal lineage is established at the get-go in the genealogy. The many prophecy fulfillments at his birth show Him to be the Promised One. The first offensive—the preaching of John the Baptist—was the proclamation of the coming of the kingdom, revealing that the King had come.

The baptism of Jesus, where He identified Himself with His people, was accompanied by the affirming words of His Father, “**This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased**” (Matthew 3:17). All this followed by His being tempted by the devil that He might fully sympathize with His people and succeed where Adam had failed.

Truly, Christ is the Messiah. This leads us to our current location in the text which might be called the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. I see at least four major points in the passage before us:

- **The Removal of John the Baptist**
- **Leaving Nazareth**
- **The Dawning of the Light**
- **Repentance**

Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee (Matthew 4:12).

## **The Removal of John the Baptist**

If one were to merely read Matthew, Mark, or Luke, one might come to the conclusion that the imprisonment of John and the departing of Jesus to Galilee happened

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<sup>1</sup> Right and wrong will certainly come up in chapters five through seven—the Sermon on the Mount.

immediately after the temptation. There were actually other events that took place during this period such as Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus (John 3) and Jesus' interaction with the woman at Jacob's well (John 4). We can also deduce that there was an overlap in the ministries of John and Jesus (John 4:2).

### **John Must Decrease**

Nonetheless it seems to be Matthew's point that the end of John's ministry was the beginning of Christ's ministry. John the Baptist would soon be out of the ministry altogether. John did not rue that day for he knew he had a specific mission.

**You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, "I am not the Christ," but, "I have been sent before Him."<sup>29</sup> He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.<sup>30</sup> He must increase, but I must decrease (John 3:28-30).**

The late Dr. Greg Bahnsen, perhaps anticipating his untimely death, once gave a sermon entitled *The Expendability of the Pastor*. It is important for Christians, ministers, and ministries to understand that everything is expendable except for the person and work of Christ. Perhaps there were followers of John who might have had a hard time transitioning to Christ. God would remove this temptation through the vile acts of Herod and Herodias (Matthew 14:6-12). Once again God would use the wicked acts of evil people for His own glorious purposes.

### **Leaving Nazareth**

**<sup>13</sup>And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup>that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:**

**<sup>15</sup>"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,  
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles  
(Matthew 4:13-15).**

### **Galilee**

Jesus would now leave Nazareth and head off to Galilee where most of His ministry would take place. Galilee of the Gentiles was geographically, politically, and religiously cut off from Judea. These people were irreligious and uncultured. The Galileans, apparently, had a distinguishably, likely crude, accent (Matthew 26:73). Galilee was not considered a very religious place and they certainly didn't think it would produce a prophet (John 7:52). In Galilee Jesus would be considered a foreigner. Matthew Henry conveys,

**The place where he preached; in Galilee, a remote part of the country, that lay furthest from Jerusalem, as was there looked upon with contempt, as rude and boorish. The inhabitants of that country were reckoned stout men, fit for soldiers, but not polite men, or fit for scholars. Thither Christ went, there he set up the standard of his gospel; and in this, as in other things, he humbled himself.<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> Henry, M. (1996, c1991). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Mt 4:12). Peabody: Hendrickson.

Jesus would extract Himself from what was considered God's city and the center of true religion. Sometimes that which is most religiously predominant and popular is not where the heart of the Lord lies—something for us to think of when we find ourselves in disagreement with the most well-known and accepted teachers of our day.

### **Zebulun and Naphtali**

It was in Galilee that the light would shine. The above prophecy is from Isaiah 9:1, 2. Have you ever heard a song, smelled an odor, walked into a room, or saw an old acquaintance that reminded you, or brought back a connotation, of some devastating time in your life? The Israelites, and students of the Old Testament, would be reminded of their distressing history when they heard the names *Zebulun* and *Naphtali*. The Israelites would be reminded of their own destruction and captivity at the hands of pagan nations (2 Kings 15:29; 18:9).

They might even be reminded that their captivity was a result of their own disobedience, having failed to clear the Canaanites out of the land as God had commanded. They often inter-married and followed their pagan gods (read the accounts in Joshua and Judges). It was this kind of faithlessness that resulted in captivity. Isaiah had given a promise of hope. This hope, as we learn from Matthew, found its ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

### **The Dawning of the Light**

**The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,  
And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death  
Light has dawned” (Matthew 4:16).**

Now we get to the heart of the blessing. The political overtones that were, perhaps, interwoven in Isaiah's initial prophetic blessing pale in comparison to the ultimate message of spiritual light embodied in the person of Christ. John's gospel reveals the nature of John the Baptist's preaching in a way we miss in Matthew.

**There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John.<sup>7</sup> This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.<sup>8</sup> He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light.<sup>9</sup> That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world (John 1:6-9).**

Jesus did not shrink back from this title. He pronounces,

**I have come *as* a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness (John 12:46).**

I cannot overstate the monumental nature of this attribute that is assigned to Christ. He is the Light of the World (John 8:12). We pause when we consider his deity (God-hood); we pause when we consider His claim of being man's sole hope of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). We must also pause and reflect upon this aspect of Christ. He is the Light and without Him there would be no light; all would be dark and in darkness.

We know people who, when they walk into a room, light up the room—it may be their smile, their joy, their energy. Jesus is not merely the light of a room or the light of my life. He is the Light of the World (John 8:12). And the Light, who is Christ, does not merely change our disposition momentarily, like an effervescent friend, Paul writes,

**For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).**

His light shines in our hearts, granting us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus—yet another testimony to God's irresistible grace.

### **Sitting in Darkness**

Isaiah's prophecy tells us the light has dawned upon those who sat in *darkness* and sat in the *region* and *shadow* of death. My friends, for Christians this *was* you, and for unbelievers this *is* you.

The unbeliever sits in darkness. He has set up camp in the darkness and there he remains. And this darkness is no mere lack of sunlight—this darkness is the region and shadow of death.

Back in the 1920's daredevils were the rage. They would do handstands on flagpoles and briskly walk on the beams of enormous skyscrapers under construction. I saw footage of one man who would go to the edge of a cliff, sit in a chair with his back to edge of the cliff, and balance the chair on its back two legs.

This is the condition of the unbeliever. Only he does this in darkness, denying the danger, and suppressing the truth that the very creation reveals and those around him are pleading with him to realize. He is in the region of eternal death but soon the chair will fall and he will fully realize that the death and darkness which he once found comfortable in his tottering chair has fallen and is burning in an unquenchable pit of eternal torment.

We therefore pray that God will bring men to their senses, shine in their hearts, and give His light—the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Paul's message for the believer is

**For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:8).**

In other words, let your behavior reflect your true citizenship. Jesus' message to those who have ears is

**I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life (John 8:12).**

Would you have the light of life? Then you must follow Jesus. How one goes about following Jesus is found in the conclusion of this portion of the text.

### **Repentance**

**From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).**

I was recently listening to a Christian radio host objecting to the necessity of repentance in conversion. He said that he had merely asked Jesus into his heart and wasn't even aware that he was a sinner. This notion of our relationship with Christ has a stranglehold on modern evangelicalism. The "I'm not religious, I just love Jesus" and "Jesus is my best friend" slogans have won the day.

One man asked me what the nature of my relationship with Jesus was. I put a lot of thought into that question and have come to the conclusion that He is my Savior and I am the one He saved—He is my Lord and I am the one He rules (although I could stand to be a more cooperative subject).

The words of Jesus are the same as John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2), “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Since I dealt with *the kingdom is at hand* earlier I will not address that subject again here. But I will once again address repentance since it is so tightly woven into the message of salvation. Notice how Paul understands repentance.

**Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” (Acts 19:4).**

Paul seems to equate repentance with believing in Jesus. Repentance is a changing of the mind. But let us not delude ourselves into thinking it is merely an intellectual acknowledgement that God requires. Some have preached repentance as if it is merely a matter of agreeing that Christ is who He says He is; if that is the case then surely the demons are redeemed (James 2:19).

Biblical repentance surely involves the changing of the mind regarding who Christ is—He is the Savior of sinners. But it must, therefore, also involve the changing of the mind regarding who we are—sinners who need saving and who must continually seek to turn away from our sins. Faithful repentance is not just knowing the facts, or even agreeing that they are correct—it involves appropriation. He is not merely the Lord of lords and Savior of sinners—He is *my* Savior and *my* Lord.

Repentance is a changing of the mind regarding *all* things! It is not uncommon for the general public to be offended when they find that Christians are voting in a manner consistent with their faith (as if anybody can possibly avoid this type of decision making). They’ll say, “Your religion is clouding your judgment” or “You’re forcing your faith upon others” (again, as if any voting person avoids this).

The church is partly to blame for this common error for we tend to religiously compartmentalize ourselves—we have our religious convictions but then have our political convictions, social convictions, familial convictions, etc. This is not Christianity!

Biblical repentance is an adjustment of our entire worldview—bringing it all under the Lordship of Christ. He is Lord of all or He is not Lord at all. Who, my friends, is your Lord? And is he (or it) capable of saving your soul? Would you continue to follow the dark path of darkness, or would you follow Jesus and have the Light of Life?

## **Questions for Study**

1. Discuss the nature of John the Baptist's ministry as it related to the ministry of Jesus (pages 1, 2)?
2. What is dispensable when it comes to the ministry? What is indispensable (page 2)?
3. Why do you suppose Jesus would begin His ministry in Galilee (pages 2, 3)?
4. What thoughts would Zebulun and Naphtali bring up in the minds of the Israelites (page 3)?
5. What are some of the implications of Jesus being the Light of the World (pages 3-5)?
6. What does it mean that people are sitting in darkness? How can they come out of the darkness (pages 4-5)?
7. How does one become a follower of Jesus (page 5)?
8. Define biblical repentance (page 5).