

Text: Matthew 4:12-17.

Third Sunday after Epiphany. **January 22, 2017.**

Brother, do you see the light? Brother, do you see the light? Some of you are thinking, "What kind of church is this? The rest of the service wasn't like this." Some of you are thinking, "Hey, that sounds like James Brown in the movie, *The Blues Brothers*." And some of you would be heading for the exits if it weren't so rude. But really, that phrase is no joke. The light is Jesus. Seeing Jesus, or not seeing Jesus, is a matter of eternal life and eternal death. Jesus wants to bring light to all people. All people, including us, especially me, are naturally in the dark when it comes to Jesus. We are all naturally in the dark. We need Jesus to bring us the light, the light of his forgiveness, the light to see him as our only Savior. The good news is this: Jesus brings light to all people. Jesus brings light to all people. Brother, do you see the light? Yes! Jesus brings light to all people.

This is a special time when Jesus was able to step more fully into the light and show all people, "I am the light of the world." John had been put in prison. The John that is referred to is John the Baptizer. This John had a special place in God's plan. John pointed the people to Jesus. John baptized countless people to lead them to repent of their sins and be given forgiveness for those sins. Yet great as John was, he had a greater message. Here's what John said, "I am not the light. I am only a witness to the light. The greater light, Jesus is coming into the world. He's so much greater than I am, I am not even worthy to stoop down and untie Jesus' sandals!" John's work was now done. He pointed all people to Jesus. Now Jesus could step into the light and bring light to all people.

Jesus carefully chose the location to bring light to all people. He left Nazareth and went to Capernaum. Nazareth was a small village. Jesus had grown up there, spent much of his childhood there. For the rest of his life, Jesus would often be called, "Jesus of Nazareth." But the people of Nazareth didn't see the light. They didn't see Jesus as the Savior of the world. When Jesus preached in Nazareth, read from the Bible and pointed to himself as the one who fulfilled the promises God made, the people scoffed. They ran him out of town. Literally! To a cliff on the edge of town and tried to throw him down and kill him. Nazareth was not the best place for Jesus to preach.

So Jesus left Nazareth behind and went to Capernaum. Now Capernaum was a bigger city. And it was a busy city. People came to and through Capernaum from all around. The message Jesus preached in Capernaum would spread to more and more places. Jesus wanted to bring light to all people.

Capernaum was the place to do that. Jesus lived there, stayed there, dwelt there. Still today, there is a sign as you enter Capernaum that says, "The city of Jesus." That's pretty accurate. Jesus spent more time preaching and teaching in Capernaum than any other place, because Capernaum was the place to bring the light to all people.

And just as importantly, being in Capernaum, by the lake, fulfilled prophecy. Ok, a prophecy is a promise or a prediction that God made ahead of time. Jesus had to fulfill every single prophecy made about the Savior or he wouldn't be the Savior, right? God doesn't lie. God doesn't make incorrect predictions, unlike football "experts." God says something is going to happen. It happens. The entire life of Jesus was laid out in advance. In amazing detail. God said, "The Savior will be born in Bethlehem, the Bethlehem in an area called Ephrathah." That's where Jesus was born. God said, "The Savior will spend some time in Egypt." Jesus spent some time in Egypt as a child to escape an angry king. God said, "They will call the Savior a Nazarene, because he will live in Nazareth most of his life." They called him, "Jesus of Nazareth," because he lived most of his life in Nazareth. Get the picture? The life of Jesus was no coincidence. There were no accidents or surprises in the life of Jesus. God promised it all. Hundreds of years ahead of time. God predicted it all, with such amazing clarity and detail that those who really paid attention, who studied the Bible with the greatest care, who were waiting for Jesus with eager hearts,

these people were brought into the light that Jesus came to bring for all people. His life was no accident. Some scholars from MIT calculated the odds that one person would randomly fulfill just eight of the prophecies that were made about Jesus. The odds are the same as if you covered the entire state of Texas, with silver dollars, two feet deep. Texas, silver dollars, two feet, ok? Then imagine you put an invisible mark on just one of those coins and said, "You can walk, fly, hoverboard all over the state, but you only get to pick one coin." What are the odds you pick that coin on the first try? Oh, and there are actually way more than eight prophecies, but the scholars at MIT said, "The numbers just got crazy after eight." Jesus is the Savior. There's no doubt. Jesus is the light of the world. There's no question. He fulfilled all the prophecies.

Including this pretty obscure one. It's found in the book of Isaiah. Have you ever read Isaiah? It's one of the longest books of the Bible. You would really have to be looking and paying attention to catch this prophecy. Good thing Matthew caught it. I probably wouldn't have. Well, it would be more accurate to say, "Good thing the Holy Spirit brought Matthew into the light to see Jesus fulfilling this prophecy to bring light to all people."

We heard the prophecy. Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali. What? Who? The nation of Israel in the Old Testament was divided into twelve tribes for the twelve sons of Israel. Zebulun and Naphtali were two of those sons. Their territory was in the north, along the Jordan River, close to a lake called the Sea of Galilee. Does that help explain a little?

Without this prophecy, you would not have expected the Savior, the Messiah, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords to come from Galilee. Galilee was not the big education and cultural center. Galilee was not the booming, prosperous area. Zebulun and Naphtali were not the tribes where kings came from. Kings came from Judah, in the south, the other end of the country. Kings lived in Jerusalem, in the south, the biggest city of the country and the most special place where the temple was located. People from Galilee were unschooled, ordinary people. That's what they called Peter and John, two of Jesus' closest followers. They were fisherman, not exactly high class. Dare I say when people thought Galilee, they thought, "redneck"? For the light for all people to come from there, from Galilee?

And Galilee of the Gentiles? Wait, Galilee was bad enough, but Galilee of the Gentiles? Gentiles? People said that word with a spit. Like Gentiles. The Gentiles weren't Jews. The Gentiles didn't worship the true God. In fact, we get our English word 'heathen,' from this Greek word for Gentiles.

And yet, to the Gentiles Jesus brought light. To the heathen, Jesus brought the good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Jesus didn't go to the country club to hang out with the saints. He went to the hospital to hang out with the sinners. And he even told us, "Go and make disciples of all nations." You know what that word for 'nations' is? This same word for Gentiles, for heathens. Yeah, Jesus brings light to all people.

The people living in darkness. Sorry, I have to go on with a little more Greek here. This word for people is usually reserved for the people of God, for Christians. Our English word laity comes from this word. The Gentiles are now God's people. The heathen are now God's laity. Jesus brings light to all people. Jesus declares all kinds of people his people, his laity, even those who were sitting in darkness.

That's the literal way to translate this verse. The people sitting in darkness. Picture that idea of sitting. Someone sitting usually intends to stay a while, right? We still say, "Have a seat. Sit down. Stay a while." Someone sitting is content. They are happy to stay sitting. And they stay sitting in the dark. They are happy to keep on sitting in the shadow of death. They don't know any better. They can't change where they are sitting. They can't bring themselves into the light.

Now picture this cold, hard, real truth. Those people sitting in darkness aren't some other people. Those

people are us. Sin is our natural condition. Sitting in our sin is our natural, contented posture. We watch our movies in the dark because we are kind of hoping Jesus isn't watching with us. We'll brag about our accomplishments, but admit our sins? We'd like to keep those in the dark, for no one else to see. And our sin paralyzes us in the dark. We can't move out of the dark on our own. We are so blind we can't even see the light. We live under this specter of death, avoiding the word, wishing it away, taking every precaution to delay the harsh reality of death as long as possible so we can continue sitting in our natural darkness.

But on those people, us, the light has dawned. Jesus brings the light to all people. Those sitting in darkness have seen a great light. The light was brought by Jesus. Jesus burst into Bethlehem, into our darkness and sent his angels to proclaim the good news that will cause great joy for all the people. A Savior has been born. Jesus carried himself to Capernaum, so all people could see the light. Jesus didn't hide his love in a corner of darkness. Jesus showed his love on a cross, for all the world to see. Jesus shouted, "It is finished!" All your sins are paid in full, all your darkness is wiped away. Then at the first light of that very special day, Jesus rose and burst the darkness of his grave, so that you too will burst the darkness of your grave, leave your tomb empty and be brought into eternal light, eternal life. Jesus poured that light on you on your very special day, the day of your baptism. That light burst the darkness of your sin. That light brought you to life, to your feet, no longer sitting in darkness, but living in light. Jesus brought the light to you. Jesus brings the light to all people.

Notice how Jesus brought that light. He began to preach. Oh no, I said the naughtiest word in today's English language. Preach. Jesus preached. He was a herald. He proclaimed this message over and over and over. That's why we still preach. Jesus preached. Jesus brought thousands of people together through preaching. Maybe it sounds like I'm just trying to save my job by promoting an outdated mode of communication. Fair enough. But Jesus preached. Jesus brought the light to all people through preaching. We are going to continue preaching until Jesus comes again because preaching is how Jesus brings people into the light.

Jesus preached this same message, over and over and over. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. See how serious is your sin, sin against a holy God. Trust in Jesus and Jesus alone for your forgiveness. Look to Jesus alone to bring you into the light. Then live in the light. Leave your sins behind. Walk in the light as Jesus is in the light. Do those things you would be happy for everyone to see, including Jesus. The king is near. Heaven is near. Don't delay bringing a friend into the light. Don't wait to get more serious about seeing the light more clearly. The kingdom of heaven is near. The light is for you. Amen.