

Lesson 10: The Light Has Dawned 4:12-17

Memory Verse: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6).

Text: ¹² Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ¹⁵ "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, *By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles:* ¹⁶ 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." ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Monday

Many years ago, Bruchko, the now famous missionary to the Motilone Indians in the jungles of Columbia South America told a story that occurred after more than five years into his mission. To that point, he had not seen any success among the Motilones. Then, one day he was walking down a jungle trail a few miles from one of the tribe's communal homes with a group of men. He began hearing shouts and excruciating yells off to the side of the path. The cries seemed to grow more desperate as they approached. "I had never heard Motilones cry out like that," he said. "They never even whimpered under the greatest pain." However, the other Motilones with him kept walking straight ahead down the trail as if nothing were happening."

"Stop," he yelled. "What's that shouting? Shouldn't we see if there's anything we can do?" They looked down at the trail and one of them said, "There is nothing we can do." They stared at the ground with dark and quiet eyes. As the cries continued, the missionary became more upset and said that he would see what he could do and started toward the cries. The others followed reluctantly. When he came to the place of the screaming and crying, he saw one of the leaders of a communal home, a fierce warrior, a man who had killed many oil company employees simply to get their safety helmets to use in cooking. He wore a necklace of buttons from his victims' clothes and another necklace of teeth from jaguars he had killed with his bow.

Now, this man was standing in front of a hole he had dug about six feet deep, shouting with a desperate searching voice, "God, God come out of the hole." The other Motilones simply stood looking sad and embarrassed. Bruchko asked, "What is the matter?" And one of the warriors answered, "His brother died....He was bitten by a poisonous snake and died....Now he is trying to look for God to get Him to bring his brother's language back to life." "And what makes him think he can find God by calling into a hole?" Bruchko asked. "It's as good a place as any to look," the warrior answered. And the hopelessness of his expression struck Bruchko more than his words ever could.

The man stopped shouting into the hole and came over to the others. His hair was disheveled, body covered with dirt, his eyes holes into black space. "There's no point," he said. "We've been deceived." "Why do you say that you've been deceived?" Bruchko asked quietly. And the warrior told him the story of a false prophet that led the Motilones many, many generations ago. The Motilones followed him, and his false promises had led them across continents, seas, and away from God. "We no longer know God," he said quietly. The men began trying to explain why the brother's death had such terrifying implications. Bruchko then and there discovered something new about the people, which they had kept hidden in all the years he was trying to understand their language and learn their ways. It was their great and terrifying sense of lostness.

The text for this week is Matthew 4 verses 12-17. The apostle is writing and proclaiming to us in these verses that Jesus is the Light. He is the light that brings hope to men, who are lost in darkness. And that hope is not just for the men and women in the lands of ancient Palestine, and it is not just a hope for the two million or so Motilones in the depths of the South American Rainforests and mountains. It is the hope for you and me as well and for those all around us -- our neighbors, our coworkers, our family. Many are lost and without hope, and in honest moments they may confess to you, "I do not know God."

Moreover, not only are there many who are lost, there are many Christians today living purposeless, meandering, careless lives. They have not captured the vision of their Lord and Savior; they have not taken His mission up for themselves, though He has called them to it; they have not embraced the cause that drove Him, the cause for which He came to earth and died; they have missed the heart of God; and they spend their days thinking about and even consumed with things that are pointless and lacking in any eternal value. They do not pray about sharing the light. They do not look for opportunities to shine it in the darkness of other's lives, and they do not pray for them in the hope that others may do so. May this text open our eyes this week and break us out of our all too common apathy.

Spend some time right now praying for the lost that God brings to your remembrance.

Tuesday

Our text this week, shares with us some very striking realities that we need to hear with fresh and open hearts. The first one I would point out is this:

1. The lost live in a terrible hopeless condition (v. 16). The Lord Jesus begins His mission after He hears that John the Baptist has been arrested and put in prison according to verse 12. He knows that this is God's timing for Him to start a new stage of His ministry, and the Lord leaves Nazareth and goes to Capernaum, a town by the sea and a critically important crossroad. It was an area that served as a bridge and a trade route between three continents. So the Lord positions Himself strategically to shine His light to the greatest number of people possible and the greatest number of travelers, that word about Him might go out and be spread abroad.

And what does the text say about these people in Galilee of the Gentiles? It says that they are “a people who sat in darkness.” They were in darkness, and that is darkness in two senses. First, it is darkness in the sense of a lack of understanding, a lack of knowledge, an inability to see the truth. Second, it is darkness in the sense of moral blackness, a lack of holiness, purity and righteousness. It is the darkness of slavery to sin.

The Bible talks about the lost living in darkness in both these senses. For example in 2 Cor. 4:4 it says of those who do not believe in Jesus, “whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.” They live in the darkness of ignorance and unbelief. And John 3:19 says, “and this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” This is speaking of moral darkness, the darkness of evil deeds which have captured the affections and love of lost men.

This darkness, beloved, is a prison. But I don’t want you to misunderstand; it is not a prison that the lost have entered into unwillingly. It is a prison that they have been cast into by their own conduct, by their own rejection of God and love of darkness rather than light. And notice what verse 16 says, they are **sitting** there. They aren’t there for a visit; they aren’t taking a rest break on their way to somewhere else. They certainly aren’t walking around looking for a way out. This is where they live day in and day out, in spiritual moral blackness, blind to the truth of God.

When I was six years old, my family spent a summer in California where my Dad took some courses at Stanford University. I have only vague memories of that time, as you might guess, being six. But one thing I remember very clearly, because it made a very powerful impression on me, was a tour of Alcatraz, the prison island. During that tour they took us and put us in one of the solitary confinement cells. The guide then turned off the lights and shut the door just as it was when a prisoner was put in solitary. The cell was so dark and sealed so tightly that you could hold your hand right in front of your face and not even see the vaguest outline or shadow of it. There was a frightening darkness in that prison cell, and I couldn’t imagine having to be confined in it alone for days or weeks. And yet, that is an exact picture of the terrible spiritual darkness of the person who does not know Jesus Christ.

But it gets even worse than that. Look at verse 16 again, “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region of the shadow of death light has dawned.” Not only do those without God and Christ sit in darkness, but they sit in “the region and the shadow of death.” In other words, they are living with death looming over them, casting its shadow. And not only is death looming over them, it is coming toward them. Moreover, this isn’t just in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali, but it is the whole world -- all other towns, cities and regions are living in the shadow of death.

For the Christian, we too are living in the valley of the shadow of death, but as we pass through we can say with David, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil [or “harm” in the Hebrew], because You are with me” (ps. 23:4). But the non-Christian,

doesn't have God with him as he is walking day to day with death looming over him. Think about that. One day, death will arrive and rather than being at peace in God, that person will have great cause for alarm and desperate fear over the harm that is about to fall. The book of Hebrews tells us that in Jesus believers have been released, who were in bondage through the fear of death. But those who haven't been released are still subject to that bondage of fear.

What a bondage the fear of death is. Consider the last words of Antitheus, a man who rejected Christ. His final words in despair and remorse as he took his last breath were, "You must not let me die! I dare not die! Oh, doctor, save me if you can! My mind is full of horror, and I am incapable of preparing for death...."

Or consider the last words of Thomas Paine, the renowned American author who wrote his prized work *Age of Reason* and spent a considerable amount of his effort in life specifically fighting against belief in God, Jesus Christ and the Bible. His last hour came in 1809, and in the utter despair of his very last moments he cried out, "I would give worlds, if I had them, that *Age of Reason* had not been published. O Lord help me! Christ help me! O God what have I done to suffer so much? But there is no God! But if there should be, what will become of me hereafter? Stay with me for God's sake! Send even a child to stay with me, for it is hell to be alone. If ever the devil had an agent, I have been that one...." And so in those last utterly terror-filled moments, Thomas Paine acknowledged the truth that he had known all along in his heart. How he regretted his lifetime of attempting to suppress and deny God and lead others in that same path of hopeless darkness.

And so we catch a glimpse from this text of the utterly hopeless condition of the lost.

Who do you know that is living, "sitting" in darkness, under the shadow of a terrible fearful death? List their names: _____

What are you going to do about it? What can you do to help them? _____

Wednesday

We reflected yesterday on the hopeless condition of the lost, but by God's grace that is not the end of the story. Because the text also teaches us a second lesson and that is:

2. Jesus Christ is sufficient to save the lost (v. 16). The Lord is the glorious Messiah that was

prophesied long ago by the prophet Isaiah, according to verses 14-16, and though the Pharisees and leaders of the Jews criticized him for coming from Galilee, He was perfectly fulfilling what was spoken through the prophets beforehand. Their criticisms were ignorant and against the prophet they claimed to revere.

We see several things that show the glory of Christ as a Savior for the lost. We see that Jesus is the Light. He doesn't just shine a light, but He is personally the Light. The light of Jesus does several things. First, **His light brings conviction of sin** as we saw John chapter 3 and see in Ephesians 5:11-13, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light." Jesus as the great Light is the one who makes all things manifest, exposing the darkness and blackness of sin.

Second, the light of Christ not only exposes sin and brings conviction, **His light brings knowledge of the truth**, opening eyes as in Acts 26:18. 2 Cor. 4:6 tells us, "For it is 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."

Jesus is the great Light that exposes sin and brings the knowledge of the truth. Now someone might say, "But this is no help at all. To expose my sin and to simply bring knowledge of the truth only shows me again how desperate is my hopelessness and how bitter is my position before God." But this light does far more than that, because third, **His light**, like natural light, **brings warmth and healing to the souls of those that embrace it**. Malachi 4:2 speaking of the Messiah says, "But to you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves." So the light that is Jesus brings conviction, knowledge of the truth and healing for those who fear God.

Fourth, **His light brings life** even in the region of the shadow of death. John 8:12 says, "Then Jesus spoke to them again saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.'" Consider also John 12:35-36, "Then Jesus said to them, 'A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.'" To become a son of light by faith, by believing in the One who is the light of the world, Jesus, is to have life, eternal and glorious. "Arise shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you" (Is. 60:1)

But not only is Christ sufficient as a Savior because he brings the light of conviction, truth, healing and life. He is sufficient because fifth, **His light brings hope**. Look at verse 16 again, "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." This is a verse that is simply resounding with hope. It is a verse shouting out, "God cares for you." God cares for those in the darkness. God cares for

those living in the shadow of death. God is bringing His light to bear.

Shortly after the Motilone warrior I told you of on Monday confessed the hopeless truth, “We no longer know God,” another Motilone said, “There is a legend of another prophet that arose after the false one, who was true, and he prophesied that one day God would return to us in the banana plant.” “How could God be in a banana plant,” Brushko asked? One of the warriors went over to a plant and pulled up the stalk, carried it over and threw it down on the ground, “This is the kind of banana plant that God will return to us in.” Another warrior took a machete and split the stalk open. It fell apart and to the missionary’s amazement the stalk took the form of a book with pages. Trembling, he reached into his backpack and pulled out his Bible. “This,” he said, “is God’s banana plant.” Hope flickered in dead eyes as they saw the pages of the book. And at that moment the light of Jesus began to dawn.

Do you agree that Christ is an all-sufficient Savior? Why or why not? _____

How has Christ been a light in your life, both in the past and in the present? _____

Thursday

Jesus brings light and hope, and also, **His light brings access**. Light, by its very nature, shows the way. When Eve and I took one of our four trips to Carlsbad caverns in New Mexico, we took a tour into the deepest caves. One of them was a huge room called the Queens Chamber and its rock formations were amazingly decorated and beautiful. During our visit to that room, the tour guide told everyone to stop where they were and not move. She then turned off the light. If possible, it was even darker than solitary confinement at Alcatraz. And without light, it was suddenly apparent that we would have been hopeless to ever try and find our way out of the caves without falling into a hole somewhere and being killed. The people who sat in darkness were cut off from the way out in complete blackness. But when the guide turned the light back on, we could walk and we could move again and find our way out. Jesus lights the way out of the valley of the shadow of death for us so that we can come to God

Finally, **His light brings purpose to our lives**. How so? Simply this, if we have seen and followed the light, then we can take others and show them the way also. Jesus says not only “I am the light of the world,” but He says to those who are His disciples, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a

basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house” (Matt. 5:14) Jesus the Great Light came to save, and He makes His followers lights as well to reflect His own glory and lead others to the knowledge of Him.

Soon after showing the Motilone’s the Bible, God moved on their hearts and revival fires bringing hope spread through the rainforest jungles of Columbia to some two million Motilones. They were a people, who for centuries had killed any outsiders that tried to contact them except one single solitary missionary. He was the only one to ever successfully make contact and live. God used that little light to transform the Motilone nation into a blazing light and missionary force as a people. He lit their fire in the greatest awakening of the last century. The nation and the tribes have become a force not of hate and war but of hope and love. They moved from a hopeless, purposeless existence in darkness, to a hopeful, purposeful life in the light of Jesus. They are now training and sending their own missionaries to other tribes. To be a light is God’s desire for you also, if you are His.

So we see in this text not only the hopeless condition of the lost, but the Sufficiency of our glorious Savior, who is the Light, bringing conviction, knowledge, healing, life, hope, access and purpose to the lives of those who come to Him in faith.

How can you let the light of Christ shine through you so that you can be a light to others in these same ways? Be specific. _____

How has God used other believers to shine His light into your life? _____

Spend some time today giving thanks for the light of our all-sufficient Savior.

Friday

Not only do we see from this text the bad news that the lost live in a terrible condition and the good news that Jesus Christ is sufficient to save the Lord, we see a third truth:

3. Repentance is necessary to receive salvation in Christ (v. 17). Repentance is necessary for salvation. How indeed do you come to Christ in faith? How do you embrace Him? How do you accept the truth that the Light exposes. Rather than turning from that truth back to darkness and clamping your eyes shut, how do you let it flow over you and do its marvelous work? Verse 17 says, “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

In order to repent, one must believe what the Light reveals and says about our sin and our true condition brought about by that sin, that we are in fact sitting in darkness with the threat of death looming over us. If we believe what the Light says about our sin and believe in the Light as John 12:36 tells us to do, then we will feel conviction; we will feel sorrow; we will turn from our sin, forsaking it, repenting of it, and committing in our hearts not to follow that old way of life any more, but to follow the new way, the light of life, Jesus Christ Himself, who brings us into the kingdom of heaven itself. So the terms of salvation, the terms of life, are believing in the Light, which is Jesus, trusting Him and turning from sin to follow Him as the true Light of your life.

What does the message of this text mean to you? How should you apply it? Three ways that I see:

a. Salvation. Have you come to the light or are you one, who as John 3:19 describes it, has loved darkness rather than light? Beware, if you refuse the light, it may leave you. Jesus left Nazareth because the people there rejected Him. Though Capernaum in the day of her visitation was exalted to heaven by the presence of Christ, in the end most of the people were thrust down into hell and utter darkness. They would receive one of the blackest of curses from the Lord Jesus, because they turned away from the light of life. Today is the day of our visitation. Christ has come to us through this book, His word. Do not turn away or harden your heart or you, like Esau, may come later longing for the blessing and be rejected, finding no place for repentance in your heart, though you seek it diligently with tears.

b. Mission. Embrace the mission of God. Even as Christ was a light, commit yourself to being a light to others. Look for ways that the Spirit can use you to bring conviction, knowledge, healing, life, hope, access and purpose to others as you take them by the hand lead them to the one true great light of Jesus Christ .

c. Worship. Worship the Lord Jesus Christ, the great light who has dawned in your soul to give you the knowledge of God in His face (2 Cor. 4:6).