

A Light to the Gentiles

Call to Worship: Psalm 100

1st Scripture: Isaiah 8-9:7

2nd Scripture: Matthew 4:12-17

Hymn Insert- *10,000 Reasons*

Hymn #192- *Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted*

Hymn #667- *To God be the Glory!*

Introduction

Having considered our Lord's initiation into His public ministry, via His baptism (receiving the special anointing of the Holy Spirit, and the divine verbal affirmation given by the Father), last time, we followed our Lord into the desolate wilderness, where He had to overcome the temptations of the devil, after having fasted for forty days and nights.

From this point on, we will be examining various aspects of our Lord's public ministry, leading up to His death and resurrection. And as we do this, it is important again, that we remind ourselves that none of the Gospel accounts are meant to be a biographical sketch of our Lord's life. We have already seen this, in consideration of His childhood and teenage years, where we are given very little information about the detailed events surrounding them. Again, we must always remember that the authors of the Gospels are only providing us with the information that is absolutely necessary to suit their primary purpose of affirming the Lord's Messianic calling and office. The Gospels are transformative messages, and not curiosity satisfying biographies.

Why do I bring this up again? Because, moving forward, you will find that Matthew (like the other Gospel writers) often skips past various events that are recorded by the other writers. And furthermore, in keeping with his primary purpose, at times, you will find him jumping around, unconcerned with presenting His Gospel in a chronologically consistent fashion. Sometimes, keeping things in chronological order can detract from the significance of various events that are meant to be grouped together for a greater theological and teaching purpose. That is not being dishonest. That is just serving a higher, more significant purpose. And so, none of the Gospel accounts are meant to be an historical biography.

That said, as we jump into our Lord's public ministry then, this morning, once again, we will find ourselves being carried back to the Old Testament, so as, to give us a better appreciation and grasp of the redemptive glory surrounding our Lord's Person, work and ministry.

I. Our Lord's Galilean Ministry

Right from the outset then, following the temptation of our Lord, Matthew skips several events that are recorded in some of the other Gospels (and especially in the Gospel of John), so as to hone in on the next important matter that he wants to bring forth to his Jewish audience. Notice, in verse 12, he mentions John the Baptist's imprisonment as that which compelled our Lord to, once again, return to Galilee. He doesn't get into the details of John's arrest, as Luke does, but simply notes it as a providential factor that shifted our Lord's focus back to Galilee, as things were beginning to heat up in Jerusalem and Judea.

And in verse 17, Matthew gives us a general description of the nature of the ministry that our Lord conducted all throughout the cities of Galilee. He states, "From that time, Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Looking back to Matthew 3:1-2, we find this to be right in keeping with the ministry and calling of John the Baptist, as well. Needless to say, once again, we can at least highlight the biblical emphasis on "repentance," when dealing with the presentation of the Gospel to the lost. In both cases (with John and our Lord), the very clear implication is that this was the type of preaching that they consistently and continually preached throughout the duration of their respective ministries.

Now, sandwiched in between verses 12 and 17 then, Matthew gives us an important summary statement, regarding our Lord's general ministry throughout Galilee, which he ties to Old Testament prophecy. And there is a significant reason for this, which we will consider in a moment [Read verses 13-16: Note: This was just after He had left Nazareth, when the Jews there were attempting to throw Him off of the top of a hill, after He had claimed to be presently fulfilling a Messianic prophecy found in Isaiah 61:1-2 (Luke records this event in Luke 4:16-31)].

Now, why then is this significant? Because Matthew, again, speaking to Jews, had to provide an explanation that addressed why the Messiah had spent the bulk of His time ministering and performing miracles up in the regions of Galilee, which were overrun with half-breed Jews (Samaritans) and Gentiles. No doubt, this reality was brought up and looked at, as a discrediting factor, concerning our Lord's Messianic office. Why in the world would Jesus spend so much of His ministry, north of Judea (heck, even north of Samaria), all the way up in those

heathen waste places, if He were the true Messiah? It doesn't seem to make sense. And so, Matthew provides three key answers to this question, the last (and most significant) of which, will carry us back into the Old Testament:

1) The providential circumstances surrounding John the Baptist's imprisonment, pressed Him there.

2) The rejection of the Jews (prophesied about in the OT, and witnessed by that which had just happened at the synagogue in Nazareth, where they tried to kill the Lord), providentially brought this about.

3) And most of all, it was the intention of God, that His ministry would take on such a focus, in accordance with the OT prophecy that Matthew quotes here, taken from Isaiah 9:1ff. Although, the promises attached to the work and ministry of the Messiah were, "to the Jew first," throughout the course of our Lord's ministry, we are meant to see an arrow, shaped by the promise that God had given to Abraham, which pointed toward the worldwide inclusion of the Gentiles. And so, pushing out from Jerusalem and Judea, the sense of this reality was already being highlighted. And by the time you get to the Acts of the Apostles, you find this reality coming into its full blown expression, especially in the ministry of the Apostle Paul. And so, in a sense, as the Apostle Paul was called to go first to the Jew, and then, to shake off the dust from his feet at their rejection, while turning his attention to the Gentiles in each region, we find our Lord exhibiting, in seed form, that reality in His own ministry. And by the time you get to the end of His ministry, what was one of the significant watershed moments that evidenced the fact that it was time for our Lord to go to the cross? It was when Gentiles began to seek Him out.

And so, Matthew tells his audience, that Jesus went and spent much time in the cities of Galilee; and in Capernaum by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, "*that it might be fulfilled*" which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet...". You see, if Matthew could link our Lord's ministry to Scripture, then that would more than suffice to alleviate the doubts and fears of his Jewish audience. And that is exactly what he does here, as he has been doing, and will continue to do, throughout the remainder of his Gospel.

All of that said, let us then consider this prophecy, here spoken by Matthew, in its original context, before coming back to view it, at its redemptive fulfillment in Christ. [Read vss. 15-16]

II. Isaiah 9:1-2

Once again, as we've seen with many of the other prophecies utilized by Matthew, the original context of our text takes us into a context of fierce judgment. In this case, God is proclaiming the great destruction that will come upon the northern kingdom of Israel (Samaria/ Ephraim) by use of the Assyrians, whom God had raised up as a vehicle of judgment upon many nations. As we've considered in the past, following the time of King Solomon, when the kingdom was divided, the northern kingdom saw, not a single godly king on her throne. Jeroboam had set up the two golden calves (one in the far north and one at the southern border of the kingdom) right from the outset, and it was downhill for the northern kingdom from that time onward. And so, their perpetual idolatry, rebellion and covenant breaking, ultimately brought about God's judgment upon them, through the Assyrians.

Our text (found at the beginning of Chapter 9) is sandwiched in the middle of this proclaimed judgment, as a means of offering some true and comforting hope for the future, even to the northern kingdom, that would soon be severely battered and exiled by the Assyrians. You get a taste of the fierceness of this judgment in a repeated phrase, that continually follows various descriptions of the striking blows that would come upon the north during this time of judgment. And in this phrase, God is ultimately saying, "And after I've crushed you by the Assyrians in this way, My anger will still not be appeased, and more fierce judgments will follow. Note the repetition then, of this phrase, interspersed between each described judgment. [Read 9:12, 17, 21 & 10:4]. And again, in Chapter 8, God's judgment by means of the Assyrians is described, as trampling all the way through the northern kingdom, and into the south (for that matter) right up to the neck of Jerusalem, although Jerusalem would be spared through the intercession of King Hezekiah and Isaiah the prophet. [Read 8:21]

And so, inserted right in the middle of these prophecies of fierce judgment, and doom and gloom, where God's judgment would sweep through the land, there is this sparkle of hope; and a very bright sparkle to be sure, speaking of a time when God's grace and mercy would yet find His people, whom He was soon going to fiercely crush for their wicked rebellion. And of course, as most of us would be familiar, it leads into the glorious and famous description of the coming birth and reign of King Messiah, who would reign over His people forever, as a righteous King,

ruling over a righteous kingdom, unlike those who have disgraced the throne in the present times of the divided kingdom [Read vs. 6-7].

But verses 1 & 2, which Matthew utilizes in our main text, bring out a profound reality connected to the coming of this glorious Messianic King. For, even after the judgment of the Assyrians, when the people resettled in the land, and the north would be populated by half-breed Samaritans (Jews, who mixed with foreigners during and following the exile), and all out heathen Gentiles to the uppermost north; amongst an amalgam of Jew, Samaritan and Gentile, this Messiah would walk and conduct a large portion of His ministry, providing the light of the Gospel, at a channel which would reach the whole world! He would perform most of His miracles and spend most of His time preaching and teaching in (indeed, He would call many of His greatest disciples and Apostles out of) the land of Galilee, where a main highway passed through, travelled by people from all over the known world. And that dark, heathenous, wretched, God-forsaken, seemingly insignificant land, upon which all manner of gross atrocities and idolatries had continually taken place....would see a Great Light! That land that was once a cursed, shadow of death; a hopeless, godless place, would be visited by the Light of Life [Read verses 1-2]!

Now brethren, before we bring this home and to a conclusion, (keeping in mind the context), I want you to recognize something profound and revealing which follows these two verses and immediately precedes Isaiah's prophecy about the coming Messiah, who would reign forever, over a kingdom of peace. As we read verses 3-5, listen to how Isaiah likens the reception of the light of grace that will come upon the land, to the joy that comes upon those, who succeed in a major military conquest, against those who had formerly persecuted and oppressed them [Read verses 3-5].

Now brethren, you have to follow me closely here, to pull out the nugget of encouragement that comes from this text. What exactly is Isaiah saying here? And how does the coming of this Light, to Galilee of the Gentiles (who is the glorious Messianic King, described in verses 6-7; Note- "*For* unto us a child is born...etc)...how does this relate to the joy experienced by a military victory over a former oppressor? Well, certainly, in a context where the Assyrians would bring about devastation among the people of God, the Assyrians could rightly be

recognized as the oppressor. But, we have to remember, at the end of the day, who were the Assyrians? Were they not the rod of God's judgment against the people of God, as a consequence of *their own* wicked and rebellious acts? You see, yes, the Assyrians had ill intentions and certainly did not acknowledge God in all of their conquests, but Israel would never have been penetrated and defeated by the Assyrians, if they had remained faithful to God's Covenant. And so, who was the real enemy of the Israelites? It was themselves, wasn't it? It was their own sin and rebellion that provoked God to bring about their destruction and exile.

And so, the military success and victory over the enemies of God's people, which Isaiah relates to the joy that would come through the conquering Messianic King, is first and foremost, not a joy of victory against aggressive nations, but rather, a joy and victory against their own sin nature and propensity toward sin. That was the ultimate problem. Would the Messiah ultimately lead His people to become victors over the world and the devil? Of course! But, the great emphasis here is on the victory that would come to God's people, concerning the ruling power of their own sin and fallen nature. That is why the "Light" is here emphasized, and that is why Matthew makes use of this text, in fulfillment of our Lord's ministry in Galilee. Because, it's the Light of God's Word and grace, brought about by Christ, which rescues lost, blind, dead sinners from the corruption that presently owns them. The Gospel is that which conquers God's people first and foremost, before it conquers the world. It destroys the old man, by bringing people into union with Christ, so that, by His death, they die to sin, and by His righteousness, they are then able to live unto God! The old master that once ruled over them is slain, and the New Master, Christ, reigns in and over them, unto righteousness.

Now, here's the kicker of the whole Gospel package, brethren. We know that this victory, which comes through this Light, is completely and entirely a work of God and His grace. In other words, man, of himself, cannot bring about this victory or change. Not by man's might, not by man's power, not by man's sword, not by man's intellect, not by anything in or from man, can such a victory over such a powerful enemy come. It has to be a work of God, from beginning to end. And that is why Isaiah, under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit of course, likens the whole victory over the oppressor, to that which happened when the Israelites overcame the Midianites, during the time of the judges [Read vs. 4-5].

Does anyone happen to remember the way, in which, God granted the Israelites a supernatural victory over the Midianites? Does the name, “Gideon,” ring a bell? Remember, when the Midianites were oppressing the Israelites, and God raised up the frail, fearful Gideon to go and war against the powerful Midianite army, who had also had the Amalekites as their ally, combining an army that was described as “numerous as locusts and sand by the seashore?” And what did God do? He pared down Gideon’s army to a mere three hundred men. And how did Gideon and his men get the victory? Remember, all they had were trumpets and pitchers with torches in them, and they spread out, at the top of the mountain, surrounding the valley, where the great Midianite army was stationed. And all they did was blow the trumpets and break the pitchers, and God had defeated the Midianites for them. The Midianite army turned on itself, killing each other, and the remaining soldiers fled in fear, and the Israelites went after them, slaying whoever remained alive. It was a complete and total victory, accomplished by God’s own miraculous means. The Israelites just blew trumpets, broke pitchers and held torches.

Such is the illustration, brethren, that God would have us visualize as we consider the great work of Christ on our behalf, and on behalf of all whom He saves. We simply blow the trumpet; declaring God’s victory in Christ on behalf of sinners, to sinners. And we are like those earthen pitchers, carrying the light of Christ and His Gospel in us. We carry God’s treasure in earthen jars. And God overcomes our flesh, so that, people see the light that God has put in us. And the sin, which ultimately destroys us, is defeated and conquered by God, through Christ.

III. Conclusion

Coming back full circle to Matthews Gospel then, friends, we hopefully gain a better appreciation of the truth that is here revealed. Jesus was not simply a Light to the Jews. He was, and is, the Light of the world, as God had intended from the beginning, and affirmed in His promise to Abraham, that although the curse of Babel had pushed mankind apart for a time, in Christ, God would redeem and unite a people to Himself, to be His own special people. The whole world would be blessed through Abraham’s Seed! And we find that happening, as Jesus shines the light of His glory in Galilee of the Gentiles, right according to plan. If this Jesus was

indeed the Messiah, why did He spend so much time up in Galilee? Because, He is the Light of *the world!*

In closing, let me ask you this morning, have you come to that Light? You see, Jesus came to expose the darkness. He came to reveal the true nature of man, of you and me, in Adam, so that we could be rescued from our sin and saved by His life, death and resurrection. You might wonder, why it is that you exist and why you have no natural inclination to know, love and serve the God who created you. You are under a curse, because of the fall of our first parents. We all bear the marks of this curse in our sinful nature, which compels us to love the things that God hates and to hate the things that God loves. Out of our fallen nature comes lies, lusts, hatred, murder, adultery, envy, pride, jealousy, theft, idolatry, blasphemy, slander, addiction, and every other wicked vice under the sun. But, Jesus came to provide and offer hope to the world. He took the curse of man upon Himself and died as a substitute on behalf of sinners. He bore the righteous wrath of God for fallen, condemned mankind. And He died! But, He rose again from the dead, securing the justification of His people. And now, He offers a way, the only way to be reconciled to the God whom we have all terribly offended. He offers us a way out of God's eternal judgment in Hell, and into God's eternal blessing in glory! And so, the call this morning, for any here who are still outside of this Christ; for those who are still shackled and bound to the power and penalty of your sins, there is hope for you, in the present, in this Jesus! The Gospel!!!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25