

The Transforming Light of King Jesus

Matthew 4:12-25

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Introduction:

A couple of weeks ago,

- we looked at that wonderful day when Jesus was officially set apart to the public ministry.
 - He came from heaven in order that He might join Himself to the church—the called out people of God—in order that He might bless them.
 - The church was desperate, in herself bringing forth no fruit that was acceptable to God, but only what was corrupt and sinful.
 - But at His baptism,
 - Jesus took His place as our Redeemer, the One who was committed to doing all that was necessary to cleanse from our sins—
 - This cleansing is the very thing that is signified by baptism...
 - Baptism is a washing with water.
- In becoming our Redeemer, Jesus was anointed to three offices:
 - the office of prophet,
 - the office of priest,
 - and the office of king—
 - He is a prophet like no other—
 - for He Himself is the Word of God sent from heaven to show us the way of salvation....
 - And a priest like no other—
 - for by His own blood and intercession, He secures for us the complete forgiveness which was only typified by all the priests who went before Him...
 - And a king like no other—
 - for He is the One who gives us the Spirit to transform our lives, and He is the One who destroys all of our enemies including Satan and death.
- His ordination was a grand and glorious event!
 - All three members of the Trinity manifested themselves at it...
 - God the Son, was (of course) Jesus Himself, the One who was set apart to the ministry for us.

- God the Spirit was revealed under the appearance of a dove, descending from the cloven skies and resting upon the Son.
- In this it was shown that the Son had a true anointing for His work by the Holy Spirit...
 - And so opened up heaven in order that all His people might receive the gift of God's Spirit.
- God the Father was heard speaking from heaven, and declaring:
 - "This is my beloved Son, in Him I am well pleased."
 - In this He showed that His love and delight in Jesus was unchanged, even though He had joined Himself to a sinful church that needed to be redeemed.
 - He knew that His Son would do all that was necessary to cleanse them.
 - This means that Jesus brings all who are joined to Him by faith into this blessed relationship with the Father!

Last week I showed you how Satan tempted our glorious Lord to turn from the ministry He had undertaken—

- It was a very difficult ministry that would lead to the cursed death on the cross.
 - Satan tried to get the Son to relieve His hunger apart from the Father's command,
 - to tempt God demanding that reaffirm His love in the way that He wanted,
 - and to look for the things God had promised in another way.
- I showed you how our Lord Jesus Christ would not yield in the least,
 - but showed Himself to be as firm as a rock...
 - He is our mighty warrior who defeated Satan for us!
 - Satan by all his crafty art could not turn Him away from the work which the Father had given Him to do.

In Matthew 4:12-17, the passage we are looking at today,

- Matthew shows you the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.
 - In this we see how God's saving grace is brought into this dark and barren world.
 - We can learn much about how He works today by looking about how the work of Jesus began in the world.

I. First of all, look at the people with whom Jesus began His public ministry.

A. He begins with His covenant people.

1. He does not go to some new people to start over in raising up a people for God.
 - No, He goes to Galilee where the descendants of Abraham were to be found.
 - In this area, the tribe of Zebulun and Naphtali resided.
 - God already has a covenant people and He does not need to build a new foundation.
 - Jesus is coming to these people to whom He had been promised.
2. Ever since God made His covenant with Abraham, He has always worked with His covenant people first.
 - a. We clearly see this throughout Jesus' ministry.
 - While He was still on earth,
 - He forbade His disciples to minister to the Gentiles—that is, those who were not covenant people.
 - In Matthew 10:5, we he said to the twelve disciples when He sent them out to minister:
 - Matthew 10:5: “These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans.
 - Now of course we know that there were special occasions when Jesus ministered to Samaritans and Gentiles,
 - He did this as a way of foreshadowing the fact that His redeeming mercy would in due time extend to the whole world...
 - but His beginning with the Jews is a reality that is carefully guarded.
 - b. Even the Apostle Paul who was called to carry the gospel to the other nations (the Gentiles) always went to the Jew first in His ministry.
 - Whenever Paul went into one of the Greek or Roman cities, he always when to the synagogue first to preach the gospel to Jews first—
 - in the place where God's prophets were already known.
 - That is where he began, and then from there he branched out to others.
 - His stated policy was, “To the Jew first.”
 - c. But do not misunderstand how this applies to us today.
 - 1) There are some who believe that we are called to minister to the Jewish people first today,
 - but that is to misunderstand the principle of God's covenant.

- 2) It is not with the Jews per se, but to the covenant people that ministry is to begin.
 - The church of the Old Testament was restricted to Jews except for the occasional exception...
 - And the people of the covenant were at that time marked out by the sign of circumcision.
 - But now the sign has been changed to Baptism—
 - And it is with the baptised people that God begins when He begins a fresh work of grace in the world.
 - When Jesus begins to bless, He always does it by first blessing those who are already his people...
 - And then through them He reaches out to those who are outside the covenant.
 - When the temple was destroyed in 70 AD, God cut off the unbelieving Jews from His covenant.
 - But as there were many Jews who were disobedient to the covenant when Jesus came, so there are many Christians who are disobedient to the covenant today...
 - Our ministry is to be those who call themselves Christians first until they so apostise that they even reject outward baptism.
3. There are quite a few reasons why Jesus operates this way...
 - a. First of all, because of God's promise.
 - God's promise is to bless the nations **through** Abraham's seed.
 - That seed is Jesus Christ, but it does not exclude the church which is His body.
 - Jesus will not have a divided body, but a body that is organically one.
 - There has never been a time in church history that God has raised up a people for Himself that were not connected to those that were already His people.
 - He threatened to do that in the time of Moses—when the covenant people worshipped the golden calf...
 - But Moses reminded Him that to do so would be to go against His own policy.
 - Exodus 32:9-14: And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it *is* a stiff-necked people! "Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I

will make of you a great nation." Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: "LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? "Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.'" So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

- There is always an unbroken continuity so that those who are baptised are all joined to one another in one body to show that salvation always comes from Christ.
 - He does not have two bodies, but one.
 - This is why we so readily accept baptism even from dead and apostate denominations.
 - By such baptism, these people are in covenant with God...
 - Though not for covenant blessing but for covenant cursing where there is no faith.
- b. A second reason that God always works with His covenant people first is to show that it is not just outsiders who need to be saved, but all of us.
 - We all need to be saved by Jesus Christ.
 - So when He came, He came to bring salvation to His people.
 - If you do not have Him as our Saviour by faith,
 - you are just as lost as those outside the Covenant.
 - In fact, you are under worse condemnation because you have broken God's Covenant!
 - In both the Old and the New Testament ages, there have been many people who were either circumcised or baptised who rejected God's salvation in Jesus Christ.
 - To such people the gospel comes again and again...
 - It comes to call them to turn to Christ, and to remind those who are in Christ to continue in Him from generation to generation.
 - God's first concern is with His covenant people.
- 4. There are important lessons for you when you consider these things...

- a. You learn that your first concern is to be for an erring brother—a member of the covenant.
 - This may be one of your own children who is walking contrary to Christ and whom you are called to discipline...
 - or it may be a neighbour or a relative who goes to an apostate church where false doctrine is preached—or where idolatrous worship is practiced.
 - Your first concern is to do your part in restoring that person to covenant faithfulness.
 - It is for this person that your prayers are to be focused and your efforts directed!
 - You leave the 99 to go after the one who has strayed.
 - This is especially true when it is someone who is a member of your own congregation...
 - but it is true of any brother—if you see him in error, you are to try to restore him.
 - We need to have a greater concern about this!
 - Your policy needs to be co-ordinate with that of Christ:
 - To the Jew first...
- b. Another implication of this doctrine of “covenant people first” is the implication of responsibility!
 - If God begins a fresh work of grace with His covenant people—usually a remnant of His covenant people...
 - Then you need to pray that He will make you all that you need to be in order that you might bring blessing to others.
 - God uses His people to convey the truth to the world—
 - If there is no Peter and John and Paul that are raised up from among His covenant people,
 - how will the nations be called?
 - As Psalm 67 teaches us, we are to pray that God will bless us in order that all the world may be blessed through us.
 - We are the conveyors of God’s truth to the nations!
 - It is both a glorious privilege and a heavy responsibility!
- c. Third, the doctrine of “the covenant people first” is a matter of praise to God and trust in God that He will not forsake the people He foreknew.

- How gracious He is to bear so patiently with His church, and to continue to stretch out His hand of mercy to her day after day!
- Do not harden your heart!
 - But respond to His grace with a warm heart of gratitude.

TRANS> Jesus always begins first with you, His covenant people!

B. But you must never let this lead you to presumption.

1. God will never forsake His covenant people as a whole,
 - but He certainly **does** cut off the cancerous parts after a time of pleading with them!
 - a. When Moses prayed in Exodus 32, He convinced God not to destroy His covenant people because of His promise to them...
 - God heard His prayer and relented.
 - He always hears such prayers because He had promised not to destroy them...
 - He is the One always raises up an intercessor who does pray, even Jesus who ever lives to make intercession for us.
 - But this did not prevent God from destroying many among the covenant people who were impenitent.
 - Thousands were cut off who were numbered among God's people, but were apostates.
 - b. God's commitment is that He will always preserve a remnant and that through that remnant He will rebuild His church.
 - Paul mentions how God's unfailing promise was fulfilled in preserving a remnant of the Jews in his day—
 - Paul himself was one of those who had received God's mercy—
 - but most of his Israelite brethren were cut off.
2. In Matthew 4:12, we see how Jesus did not remain in the wilderness region just outside of Judea where He was baptised.
 - a. The verse says that He departed to Galilee as soon as He heard that John had been put into prison.
 - The religious leaders in Jerusalem did not like John, but they were afraid to oppose him because all the people knew he was a prophet.
 - But they were delighted when Herod arrested him and put him in prison.

- There was no protest raised by them at all, and Herod knew that they would be pleased.
- b. Jesus knew that He could not continue His ministry in Judea without bringing about a premature crisis.
- 1) The time for Him to be crucified must not come until after He had preached and revealed Himself through signs and wonders that the Father had given Him to do.
 - 2) And so, for safety, He departs and goes to Galilee.
 - John's gospel speaks about Jesus' brief ministry in Judea which followed His temptation and concluded with John's arrest.
 - John explains the reason that Jesus left:
 - John 4:1-3: "Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptised more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptise, but His disciples), he left Judea and departed again to Galilee."
 - The Pharisees were stirred up against Him, so He departs.
3. But brothers and sisters, do you see the application here?
- a. This is a judgement against Judea!
 - It is a judgement that they bring upon themselves by the hardness of their hearts!
 - They, in effect drove the Messiah out of their territory so that the light did not begin to shine among them...
 - Instead the light arose in Galilee!
 - b. There have been many times when God's rebellious covenant people have driven out Christ from their midst!
 - One of His prophets begins to speak for Him, and the apostate people cannot bear it, so they drive Him out!
 - Was it not the case at the reformation that Luther and Calvin and Knox and so many others were raised up to testify of Christ to His Covenant people and were driven out by the Pope and his wretched disciples?
 - Did the apostates not slaughter many reformers for no crime but faithfully testifying of the truth?
 - But we can come even closer to our day...
 - Have we not seen faithful ministers driven out of the Presbyterian Church in Canada—because they would not follow along with that denomination's rebellion against God's word?

- c. Brothers and sisters, how careful you need to be that you never banish Christ from your midst!
 - 1) Matthew goes on to tell us that Jesus did not remain in Nazareth (where He grew up) upon His return to Galilee,
 - but left to settle in Capernaum which is on the coast of the Sea of Galilee.
 - Luke tells us the reason He did not stay in Nazareth—
 - it was because the people of His home town rejected and tried to kill Him.
 - 2) Examine yourself!
 - Are you banishing Christ or are you gladly welcoming Him?
 - Do you reject the light of His truth, or do you embrace it gladly?
 - Let me ask you—did you prepare yourself to come to church today?
 - Did you pray and ask God to show you His truth and to feed you with it?
 - And when you leave, do you walk away and quickly forget those things that you have heard?
 - This is the beginning of pushing Christ away!

TRANS> Brothers and sisters—Christ will go and minister to other of His covenant people if you will not have Him minister to you.

- He will cut you off and bring His blessing to others...
- But just what is the blessing that He brings?

II. Brothers and sisters, Matthew shows that where Jesus' public ministry begins, light arises!

- READ v. 15-16

A. Isaiah spoke these words after the region of Galilee had been blasted twice by the Assyrian invasions; and when more is threatened to come.

1. Zebulun and Naphtali were among the first four tribes of Israel to be taken into captivity!
 - God's judgement had begun with them.
 - Their darkness was great.
 - a. Isaiah described them as sitting in the darkness...

- Now God is light, so to be sitting in the darkness is to be cut off from meaningful interaction with God.
 - It is to be dead with respect to God...
 - to miss the whole reason we exist—which is to know Him, to enjoy Him, and to glorify Him.
 - Those in the dark do not even know where they came from, where they are going, or why they are here.
 - They live their lives as a blind man who does not know where he is going.
- b. Isaiah described them not only as sitting in the darkness, but also as sitting in the region and the shadow of death.
- The shadow of death is the place of danger—
 - You are in the shadow of death when you are seriously ill and about to die, or when someone has the sights of his rifle fixed on you.
 - It speaks of the approaching judgement of God that hangs over you like a sword on a thread,
 - ready to fall at any moment.
- c. And that they were **sitting** there means that they were settled in the darkness—
- they had found their place there and were dwelling in the dark with no particular concern about it.
 - They were perfectly content to remain in their aimless ways, and had no concern about their danger—
 - like a sick man who does not know that he is sick—
 - he is in the shadow of death, but he does not know it.

TRANS> Zebulun and Naphtali were the first to fall into this gross darkness...

2. But Isaiah tells them that they will be the first to see the rising of the light that the Messiah will bring into the world!
- a. It is fascinating to see that some of the ancient Jewish fathers understood this passage in Isaiah to teach that the Messiah would begin His ministry in Galilee.
- John Gill says, for so they say expressly,
 - “the king Messiah shall be revealed, ‘in the land of Galilee.’”
 - And in another place explaining Isa 2:19 they say,

“the ‘glory of his majesty’; this is the Messiah; when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth, when he shall arise and be revealed, "in the land of Galilee": because that this is the first place to be destroyed in the holy land; therefore he shall be revealed there the first of all places.”

TRANS> These ancient Jewish expositors were right, for Matthew tells us that that is exactly what happened in fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy.

- b. But what is even more wonderful is the very fact that is assumed in this statement of Isaiah...
 - That the Messiah is the One who brings light into the world!
 - This is the transforming light of King Jesus!
 - Wherever He ministers, the light shines!
 - It is in Galilee that the Sun first came up to shine that was destined to rise upon the whole dark world!
 - The introduction of the Messiah into the world was the introduction of light into the world!

B. I plead with all of you to cherish this precious Light!

- 1. It brings you out of the darkness to join you to God who is light!
 - We go to sleep in our wretched sinful ways...
 - alienated from God...
 - In the darkness you are not even able to see how vile your ways are in the light of the truth of God.
 - In the darkness, you cannot see how polluted and dirty and corrupt you are.
 - So do not be discouraged when the light comes your way—He comes and He exposes you for what you are...
- 2. But do not look upon Him as a judge, but as a gracious Saviour!
 - a. He does not come to judge, but to save.
 - Look at Him as the excellent physician who tells you all that’s wrong with you—not in order that He might condemn you, but in order that He might heal you!
 - b. The light not only shows you the truth about yourself—which is not so pleasant—
 - but it also shows you the truth about God the Saviour!

- It shows you that He is a gracious God, who delights to show mercy to sinners.
 - It shows you the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ who came to save—
 - That you might not run from God but too Him!
- c. Oh you people, you miss so much when you miss this light!
 - When you do not see the true glory of God as a holy, gracious, forgiving God who is full of both justice and mercy.
 - Jesus showed us His power of life and death in the miracles He wrought...
 - He showed us His power over Satan in casting out demons and forcing them to obey...
 - He showed us His grace to save in the gracious words that He preached...
 - And He showed us how to live before the face of God by His example and close application of God's law to our hearts!
 - He exposes the barriers you erect between yourself and your God...
- 3. Oh fools to resist such glorious light!
 - This is a great light that has now come into the world and it is here to stay!
 - It has arisen, not just for Zebulun and Naphtali, but for the whole world!

TRANS> But how does Jesus bring that light to you—and others—now?

III. Jesus brings us the light in the same way He did when He first began His public ministry... He brings it to us by preaching.

A. Preaching is the method by which He brings light into this dark world...

1. This is brought out for us in verse 17.
 - a. What did Jesus do when He began His public ministry?
 - “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
 - Jesus had done some preaching before, but from the time He came back to Galilee, He continued to preach.
 - b. There were many other things He might have done,
 - The Greeks had their plays that they employed to mediate the truth of their gods...
 - If Jesus had wanted to conform His method to the culture, he could have employed drama instead of preaching...

- And then there were in the Greek religions the common practice of trying to work ones self up into a frenzy—by speaking in tongues that were not understandable languages, by yelling and wild dancing, by drinking and using drugs, by sexual acts with temple prostitutes...
 - But Jesus’ kingdom is about conveying light and none of these methods were helpful for that...
 - Many of them were in themselves deeds of darkness that the light detests, and whose vileness can only be seen in the light of Christ.
2. This method with which Jesus began is the method that He has commanded to be used in the church until the end of the age...
- a. He sent His disciples out to preach in all the world, and commissioned them to ordain others to preach after them.
 - “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,” He told them.
 - There has been a succession of preachers ever since.
 - b. Wherever preaching has been honoured, God has always blessed that place;
 - and wherever it has fallen into disuse, darkness has soon followed!
 - There are many today who speak ill of preaching—
 - They want to have a more subjective experience with God—
 - Preaching is too objective for them.
 - c. Church history testifies to their folly.
 - The church in the Middle Ages began to replace preaching with visual representations of Christ and His work.
 - They had pictures that showed Him suffering on the cross, and that showed His baptism and His miracles—
 - They turned the sacrament into a dramatic presentation in which Christ was offered up again on an altar—
 - The result was that the people fell into gross darkness and superstition.
 - Soon, they were very easily manipulated by their leaders because they no longer had the light of God’s word.
 - The greatest contribution of the reformation was not the reform of doctrine, but the reform of worship, which included a return to an emphasis on preaching.

- This is what brought the light of the truth that had been recovered back to God's people and brought them out of the terrible darkness...

B. But what is preaching?

1. The word means to proclaim or herald a message that has been given.
 - A herald's job is not to come up with his own message, but to faithfully convey the message the king has given to him, and to carefully apply it to the ones to whom it is sent.
 - The goal is for the king's voice to be heard in the herald.
2. That means that preaching is not speculating, making suggestions, stating possibilities!
 - It is the proclaiming of truth, of things certain, of things settled by Christ in His Word by His authority.
 - Linskey says: "to preach is not to argue, reason, dispute, or convince by intellectual proof, against all of which a keen intellect may bring counter-argument. We simply state in public or testify to all men the truth which God bids us state. No arguments can assail the truth presented in this announcement of testimony. Men either believe the truth, as all sane men should, or refuse to believe it, as only fools venture to do."
 - Linskey is right on track!
 - Preachers err as soon as they move away from simple proclamation to introduce novelties!

C. Here we are even told what that message was that Jesus preached—not once, but everywhere He went...

1. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
 - a. Recently, I showed you that John preached this same message—
 - it was also the message that Christ's disciples went out to preach after He was gone.
 - b. It is a timeless message that applies to every generation that has ever lived in this fallen world.
 - A minister shows that He is joined to Jesus as a preacher by preaching this message.
 - If he deviates from it, then He is no minister of Christ, but a deceiver and a minister of the Devil.
2. The message is one that offends—
 - a. Because it commands men to repent of what they are!

- To repent is to change your mind about what is good and what is bad...
 - To admit that what you think is wrong and that what God says is right.
 - To admit that you have been living all wrong and that you need to change to conform to the light of the truth.
 - As I showed you before, light reveals the truth—
 - it shows you what is wrong with you—
 - Then it calls you to repent, to turn from what is wrong to what is right.

- b. The second part of the message is the reason to repent—
 - It is because of what Jesus is doing—establishing His kingdom!
 - When the light shows you about Jesus—
 - Remember what I said about Him before?
 - That He is the one who came, not to condemn the world, but to save the world...
 - And that He is the One who washes away our sins so that we can come to God...
 - And that He is the One who gives us the Spirit to change us so that we can be restored to a whole new life...
 - In short, that He is the One who establishes His kingdom in the world in which we are brought under our Creator again—
 - to live under His rule and according to His counsel and by His grace.
 - I say, when you realise that His grace is wide open to bring you all this blessed benefit—
 - Then what is left but to repent?
 - than to turn away from what you are and run gladly to this kingdom?
 - Preaching is the light urging you and commanding you to do what is truly in your best interests.

- c. “Repent, because you are not so wonderful—but God’s kingdom is wonderful.”
 - I hope none of you will ever grow weary of this message!
 - It is the message Jesus preached every where He went.
 - If you would hear His voice, you must hear this message.

CONCLUSION

There is a sad note to end with.

- Although the great light of Christ did shine upon the people of Galilee,
 - Jesus will later complain at them that although they had all this light so graciously given to them, they did not repent!
 - Mt 11:21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.
 - You see, just because the light is there does not mean the light is obeyed.
 - What about you?
 - What will you do with word of God that you heard today?
 - Will you walk away playing the tape of all your covetous desires in your head...
 - Or will you walk away playing the tape of all your complaints and excuses?