

Introduction

We all know what a difference light makes. You can't explore a cave without it. You can't read without it. You can't appreciate visual beauty without it. Almost everything we do depends on light. This morning I want you to see that there is a close kinship between preaching and light shining. We see it in how light and preaching come together in the ministry of Jesus.

[Read Text and Pray]

Three themes comprise our section of scripture this morning. Jesus' withdrawal, Isaiah's prophecy, and Jesus' words.

I. Jesus' Withdrawal (12-13)

A. The text says that when Jesus learned that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.

1. John's summons to repentance went beyond the wilderness. It went to the throne of the land. John had confronted Herod Antipas about his sin. He had taken the wife of his brother Philip, and John had been saying it was not lawful. Herod responded by arresting John and putting him in prison.
2. This was an indicator to Jesus to move on to the next phase of his mission. So he withdrew to Galilee, 90 or so miles northward from Jerusalem. And that is why the word withdrew is used here. For the time being Jesus was distancing himself from Jerusalem and its strong contingent of Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus had been publicly introduced to the crowds which came to hear John and be baptized by him. According to John 4, Jesus' following of disciples had increased over that of John, and the Pharisees had become aware of it. At this point, it was time for Jesus to avoid encounters with trouble-makers. So he went north. On his way to Galilee, he traveled through Samaria and spoke with the woman at Jacob's well.
3. Jesus continued on to his hometown of Nazareth. We learn from Luke that he was not warmly welcomed there. The townspeople became

enraged with him when he told them what was in their hearts. They sought to throw him down the cliff, but he escaped. Leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum. This area today is mostly uninhabited. But in those days the area bustled with people. Rich soil was present in the area. There were also the resources offered by being located on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, a lake teeming with fish.

The area was that which had been designated for the tribes of Zebulun, Naphtali, and Asher when the Israelites were first settling the land. These were the outer reaches of the promised land and more vulnerable to the influences of surrounding peoples. The region had become a melting pot of sorts with people from Syria and Phoenicia mixing with the Israelites and Jews. This is a fact that was recognized even by Isaiah's prophecy quoted by Matthew. Isaiah called the region Galilee of the Gentiles.

B. It is worth noting that Galilee is where Jesus began his ministry in earnest. Galilee of the Gentiles in the far reaches of the land is the location in which the bulk of his ministry begins and takes place rather than in Jerusalem and Judea. The Jews of the day were so proud and self-assured. But from the start Jesus is demonstrating that he is the savior not only for Jews but for the whole world. What a wonderful and glorious truth. If you are a Gentile, it should never cease to amaze you that you are a part of God's family. When Adam sinned, he sinned away any hope of being in fellowship with God for himself or for anyone else. God was under no obligation to save anyone. He could have justly ended it all right there and then or forever just taken his hands off for a world in rebellion against him to experience the just sentence of eternal death and darkness. Graciously, He chose a man named Abraham whom he blessed and whose seed he would bless. These are the Israelites. They received the redemption. They received the word of God and the law of God. These were all gifts of grace.

People without grace are without hope. We would all be justly lost; justly condemned; justly facing the eternal wrath of God if it were not the good pleasure of God to save Gentiles as well as Jews. When Paul wrote the epistle to the Ephesians, he wanted the Gentiles to bear this in mind. He said, "Remember that at one time you Gentiles . . . were separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the

covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. . . . Through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord. The Gentiles are fellow heirs, member of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

The inclusion of Gentiles is a glorious truth. He started through Israel, but it was his plan to include Gentiles in to his chosen family. It is by his grace. It is according to his mercy. He owes us nothing. If we did not have the hope of the gospel today, where would we be? Right where we deserve to be—in misery and gloom. If you did not have the hope of the gospel what reason would there be to live? We need to marvel at the grace of God bringing us poor wicked Gentiles into his kingdom, into his family, and into his love.

II. Isaiah’s Prophecy (14-16)

A. Jesus’ venture into Galilee points out that his saving work is aimed at the world, but it also fulfills prophecy spoken through Isaiah.

He had foretold that the people of the region would see a great light, that a light would dawn upon them. And Matthew declares to us that Jesus’ coming to Zebulun and Naphtali as Messiah fulfills this prophecy. In seeing Jesus, they saw a great light. As they observed and listened to Jesus, a light dawned upon them. So yet another prophecy is fulfilled in the train of fulfillments Matthew is showing us. It is yet another evidence that Jesus is Messiah. Fulfilled prophecy is one of the ways in which the One True God distinguishes himself from all others. The rest are pretenders. They are wanna be’s. In actuality all other gods are believed to be or made to be by the imaginations of men. The one true God shows that there is no one besides him because he is the only one who tells what he is going to do before he does it so that when he does it, it is evident that he did it. Things

do not simply happen in random unpredictable fashion, They are governed and ordained by the sovereign God apart from whom not one sparrow falls.

This is what he declares in Isaiah 46 – Remember the former things of old, for I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying My counsel shall stand and I will accomplish all my purpose.

The way that Jesus so amazingly fulfills prophecy should in and of itself be enough to warrant taking the whole Bible seriously and to convince of its truthfulness and authority. It certainly assures believers in our stand on scripture that we are standing in the right place.

B. There is communicative power in the prophecy of Isaiah. It stems from the use of two opposite images—darkness and light. First, there is darkness. This description sets forth the condition of the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. The people were dwelling in darkness. They were dwelling in the region of death and the shadow of death. Death cast a dark shadow over the land.

The darkness over the land about which the prophet had spoken is the darkness of spiritual death. The groaning and misery of the people was a result of the darkness of their minds and hearts. They were dark towards God. The condition is attributable to several factors. We have noted that the region was distant from the worship center of Israel. Furthermore, they had not eliminated the Canaanites when they came into the land so the Canaanites were a spiritual stumbling block. Over the course of the generations, like all of Israel, the folks in these regions had forsaken and disobeyed God. They worshiped idols and had suffered the oppression of foreign enemies. The Assyrians had taken many from the tribes and replaced them with Assyrians and other non-Jews. So the darkness was intensified by the infiltration and domination of Gentile peoples.

Isaiah describes the people as inquiring of mediums and necromancers and the dead rather than God. Because they would not give heed to God's word, the Lord was binding up his testimony. He was hiding his face from the people. They would stumble and fall. They would be snared and taken. They would be in misery and gloom and anguish.

C. Into this spiritual darkness a light shone. Spiritually speaking, the sun came up on the land when Jesus appeared there. That is because he is the light of the world. He is the hope for their darkness. He is the light of life. What Jesus came to bring is life and light. And that is what the world needs.

When Paul addresses the church in Colossae, he points out to them that God through Christ has qualified those who believe in him to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Through Christ God has delivered his people from the domain of darkness and transferred us to his kingdom.

John says that God is light and in him is no darkness at all, and if we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin.

What do I mean by all this? I mean that the darkened spiritual state of the world, the misery and ignorance and dishonor of sin is the condition of every person by nature. I mean that Jesus is the need for every life. He is the solution for forgiveness for the darkness of our sinful deeds. He is the solution for the dungeon of darkened understanding into which we are born. He is just what we need. In John 8:12, Jesus spoke of himself saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." He brings life and that life is light. It illumines our very being. He is what we need to remove our darkness and its misery and gloom.

But get this. There will be no acceptance of light in the world without light in our hearts. There will be no acceptance of the light that shines in the world without light shining in our hearts. You see, despite the fact that Jesus came and shone light into Zebulun and Naphtali, for the most part the people did not follow him. In fact for the most part, the people ultimately rejected Jesus.

In Matthew 11 Jesus denounces a series of cities where he spoke his words and did his works but they did not repent. Capernaum is one of them and this is what he says to it. "And you Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done

in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”

The light shines. But it must be welcomed to have its effect. It must be embraced to bring life. John says, “This is the judgment: the light has come into the world but people loved darkness rather than light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” (John 3:19-21) It takes a work of God to overcome the darkness and death of the human heart even to be able to welcome the light that shines in our face. The human heart is so dark and so dead that if there is not first a life-giving, light-shining work in that heart, there will not be a welcoming of the light shining outside the heart. Paul tells the Corinthians, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” But enabling a person to understand spiritual things is a work that God graciously performs. It is a work that he has done in you if you believe in Christ. It is a work that involves light. 2 Corinthians 4:6 says, “For God who said let light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” If you have embraced Christ, who is the light, it is because God first shone the light of Christ in your heart. All the praise for you coming to him, not rejecting the light, goes to God for his mercy and grace and power.

III. Jesus’ Witness (17)

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

There are several aspects of this verse that stand out.

A. First, this was the beginning of the public ministry of Christ in earnest. “From that time Jesus began” stresses that it was at his time that he took everything to the next level. He had been introduced, tempted and tried, and was adding disciples. Now he is going after the masses. Even John the

Baptist's ministry was characterized by the people going out to him. Jesus is now going out to the people.

B. Second, it is striking to see the method by which Jesus is pursuing the people. From that time Jesus began to preach. Here comes the light of the world into the darkness, and how does he shine the light? How does he illuminate the darkness? He preaches. If this seems strange to you, you are not the first. You want to go in and reach people with the light. How do you do it? How do you get their attention? What can you do that will convince them to repent? Do you hold plays or concerts? Here is what Jesus did: he preached. It is rather like the approach of Jonah in Nineveh. Jonah went through the city of Nineveh calling out, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown!" So Jesus simply began to call out, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The Greek word for preach is *kerusso*. It means to speak forth, to proclaim, to announce, to cry out with a message. The idea is that you are in a public situation lifting your voice to those who can hear, and you are declaring to them a message. It is not a debate. It is not an argument. Preaching is not a two way conversation. Lenski in his commentary on Matthew explains the nature of preaching. He says, "The point to be noted is that to preach is not to argue, reason, dispute, or convince by intellectual proof against all of which a keen intellect may bring counterargument. We state in public or testify to all men the truth which God bids us state. No argument can assail the truth presented in this announcement or testimony. Men either believe the truth, as all sane men should, or refuse to believe it, as only fools venture to do."

Preaching carries with it the air of authority. As John MacArthur writes, "Preaching is the proclamation of certainties not the suggestion of possibilities." That's what Jesus did. He spoke as one with authority. He was confident because he only said what the Father told him to say. This is the approach of God to pursue the multitudes to get them ready for the kingdom.

Today the method for preparing people for the kingdom is still the same. Paul told Timothy to "Preach the word." As preaching was central to the

ministry of Jesus, it is central to the ministry of the church today. We preach. We proclaim truth. We do not espouse our uncertainties or what we think might be. We herald the word of God.

The Apostle Paul invested his hope for evangelization in preaching. He recognized the folly of preaching as the means by which God saves and calls people to himself. He wrote to the Corinthians, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God and the wisdom of God." He further said, "It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe."

For Paul to employ a method other than preaching Christ was to resort to underhanded means. Listen. This 1 Corinthians 2. "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified . . . and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

This is the way that God works. He uses the weak and unseemly methods and people and numbers of people to accomplish his purpose so that it will be abundantly clear when the results take place that it is not man's power or ingenuity that has brought it all about. It is the power of God at work.

B. Sometimes when the word is preached, it seems like nothing happens. It is not because the word of God is impotent. When God called Isaiah to preach, he told him that people would not be listening. Jesus preached to the millions of people in the region of Capernaum, but largely they did not believe. When people do not respond, when they do not repent, it is not time to change the method. It is time to persevere in obedience and keep preaching. Just when we might not expect it, God moves and people believe. Jonah had a simple message he preached in Nineveh, but their was a massive revival. Paul kept preaching because he did not want peoples faith to rest on the power of man but upon God. And people believed. When the word is preached and people believe then God is truly the one who is at work.

Paul wrote this to the Thessalonians: "For we know brothers, loved by God, that he has chosen you because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction."
"You received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit."

People everywhere are reporting what kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead who delivers us from the wrath to come."

That was some reception! It was not because of apologetics or arguments or flashing lights. It was because God visited the preaching of the gospel with power. You want to see the power of God? Preach and pray. Preach and pray. If something is going to happen, it is when the word of God is preached. So that is what we are going to be committed to do here in this church. And it what each of us should be about doing. Preach!

Preach!

Preach the word of God to yourself.

Preach the gospel of God to the lost!

Attend to the preaching of the word.

Preach the nearness of the kingdom!

Preach the need of people to repent! To turn from their sins and to trust in Jesus and to serve the living and true God and wait for the return of him who saves of from the wrath to come.