

January 25, 2026

St. Matthew 4:12-17:

## **We Live in Light in the Midst of Darkness**

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St. Matthew 4:12-17

Dear Friends in Christ,

When I think back over the years of ministry here, I recall the times when the pastors have been approached by a member of our Pilgrim family informing us of a medical diagnosis that is or could be, terminal. It rips the heart. But I ask you, do you ever wonder if there's something going on in your body that could take your life, or what the verdict will be at your next medical examination?

I read an account of a young couple who were thinking of becoming missionaries. While talking to a missionary couple, they listed issues they were facing and repeatedly stated how uncertain life was for them. The missionary couple said, "All of our lives are uncertain. You just happen to know it, and most of us don't."

It's a dark, uncertain issue, isn't it, "...(walking) through the valley of the shadow of death..."? Sometimes it's hard to remember, isn't it, "Give us this day our daily bread" - not tomorrow's bread? Our tomorrow's, our uncertainties, are known only to God, but he doesn't leave us groping in darkness. In Christ...

## **WE LIVE IN LIGHT IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS**

### **I. The Darkness Then**

Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulon and Naphtali (vv.12-13).

Concerning John's ministry, Matthew wrote, "For this is what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah when he said, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make his paths straight (Mt. 3:3)."' His arrest was the beginning of the end of his ministry. He had prepared the Lord's way.

Jesus left Jerusalem and traveled around 70 miles north to Galilee to begin his ministry. The journey would be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy made over 700 years before Christ walked the earth: "The land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles--the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death on them a light has dawned (vv.15,16)."

When he first entered Galilee, he briefly settled at Nazareth, his boyhood home. From there "he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea of Galilee in the territory of Zebulon and Naphtali." Capernaum was a fishing village and home of Peter, Andrew, James, and John, a village made-up of Jew and Gentile. This would be the home base for Jesus' ministry.

Zebulon and Naphtali were the two most northern tribes of the 12 tribes of Israel. Our text then states these words from the prophecy of Isaiah, again, "The land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles--the people dwelling in darkness...(vv.15-16a)." People dwelling without the Word.

700 plus years before Christ the darkness enveloped the 10 northern tribes because of their idolatry. As a result, they were taken into captivity and exiled by the Assyrians. Scriptures say, "And the king of Assyria (replaced God's people with people from) Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel (2 Ki.17)." These people worshipped their individual gods and as a result we're told, "The Lord sent lions among them, which killed some of them... Then the king of Assyria commanded, "Send there one of the priests whom

you carried away from there, and let him go and dwell there and teach them the law of the god of the land (2 Ki.17:37)." But the darkness remained until the time of Jesus, which is where our text takes us.

## II. The Darkness Now

In a sermon, years prior to the year 2000, I stated, "It's a stunning thought, isn't it, that a good number of us will probably be alive in this world at the close of this decade (the 1990's)? Stunning because it would mark not just the end of the decade but the end of the century and start another Millennium, where we are.

Sobering, isn't it? Humanity has come a long way to...where? The same darkness? We've traveled 2000 years from the time Jesus walked this earth in the flesh. The dreams of a multitude of generations are dust. All the exciting plans and formulas for a better world have brought us...where? We dare not walk the streets of any city at night for fear of our lives. We dare not correct others who are doing wrong for fear of our lives. We fear the wickedness of people who have devised poisonous programs that pull our children into darkened and godless thinking. Most everything we eat is bad. Most everything we drink is bad. And every generation sacrifices its quota of sons and daughters on countless altars of war, hatred, abortion, perversion. The darkness thickens!

I couldn't help myself, but I pulled out an article written 30 years ago that appeared in The Religion and Society Report. The article is entitled; Can Crisis Be Chronic? I hope you will listen to this portion of the article:

A sense of foreboding and impending doom effects ever broader segments of culture. Nothing helps, nothing works. Art no longer creates beauty but is meant to "shock." Education, from the grandest Ivy halls to the humblest preschools, has become preoccupied with teaching about variations...of sexual conduct. Medicine can pause in its endless quest for new therapies and more effective treatments if it can be allowed to solve its challenges by interpreting the "full range of medical services" to mean such life pending measures as unhindered access to abortion and ready provision of "physician assisted suicide." The news and entertainment media in several countries (and I would add our country) have perfected the technique of exposing each real and imagined flaw in public officials as soon as they take office, destroying every vestige of the moral authority that makes it possible for rulers to govern by persuasion rather than to rule by force or compulsion. With a few praiseworthy exceptions, the most notable leaders of the most prominent churches devote themselves to not telling their people what to believe and how to live in order to know and serve God, but that they do not need to believe in all of the rules of conduct that they may break with impunity in order to fulfill themselves and serve their own basest desires and grossest lusts.

30 years ago - 1996! Again, the article was entitled "Can Crisis Be Chronic?" It's no longer "Can Crises Be Chronic?" - it is! How could we miss it? Before the flood we're told, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intention of his heart was only evil continually (Gn.6:5)." After the flood, which includes this time and time to the end, God said, "...for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth (Gn.8:21b)." Concerning where we are now Jesus said, for then there will be great tribulation such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be (Mt.24:21)." How could we miss it? There will be no heaven on earth, but there will be the sick darkness of sin, dying, and death and the darkness will intensify – it will and has.

### III. Light

Listen again to these words of our text: "(Jesus) went and lived in Capernaum by the sea in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled (vv.13,14)." Here are the words: "The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned (v.16)." Jesus is the Light! He is life! Jesus said it, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but we will have the light of life (Jn.8:12)."

You can't miss it: *Will not walk in darkness!* Without Christ that's where we live, in the darkness of the most twisted thinking and doing! Oh, sure, we might see a moment or two of revival, but this word of Jesus must stand in front of everything: "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart I have overcome the world (Jn.16:33)."

And so, our text states: "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand (v.17).'" The Small Catechism asks. "Who are repentant believers?" The answer: "Repentant believers are those who are sorry for their sins (contrition) and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior (faith)." David declared, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Ps. 51:17)." And Paul reminds us, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31)." And it would be strengthening to hold on to these words of David: "I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not cover up my iniquity; I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin (Ps.32:5)."

This is what we are to understand at the foot of the Cross: We come before Him as beggars – sinners - without a bargaining position yet loved by Him! The Lord said, "I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like a mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you (Is.44:22)." Christ redeemed us, paid the debt we owe; a sinless life and suffered the punishment for the sins we commit. We have been redeemed!

We live in a very dark and demonic world! I pray that no one thinks, or says, "I don't want to think about it, it's too negative!" If that's the case, I say, "Wake up, learn and apply God's Word, the Bible, and the visible Word of the Sacraments to your life that you may declare, "Your word (God's Word) is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Ps.119:105)." **Live In Light in the Midst of Darkness. And let your light draw others to the path that leads to the eternal light, that they may live!**

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott