



## MATTHEW 4:12-17 | The Light of the World Casts His Beams

Sunday, January 25, 2015 – Third Sunday of Epiphany

<sup>12</sup> When He heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew into Galilee. <sup>13</sup> He left Nazareth behind and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. <sup>14</sup> This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

<sup>15</sup> Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,  
along the sea road, beyond the Jordan,  
Galilee of the Gentiles!

<sup>16</sup> The people who live in darkness  
have seen a great light,  
and for those living in the shadowland of death,  
light has dawned.

<sup>17</sup> From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!"

Light is a good thing. People crave light. In fact, statistics show that the state in our nation which records the most number of cases of depression is the darkest state in the union—Alaska. On December 24—the Winter Solstice—the average Alaskan only had about 5 hours of daylight. Those living in the northern parts of the state experienced 67 days straight of darkness. The sun never rose! Scientists attribute this rate of depression to the lack of sun and the nutrients it provides. Sunlight carries vitamins with it that produce chemical reactions in the human body that control mood and emotion.

Based on this study alone, we see that darkness isn't just some inconvenience. Darkness is harmful to humans. Humans crave light. Think of a 2 year-old child who is sleeping in a room alone for the first time. What does he need? A night light. Think of how many light switches, lamps, ceiling lights, flash lights, night lights, and all kinds of other lights that you have in your home. Humans crave light. But light isn't just some commodity humans wish they had...they need it.

The same is true of our spiritual lives. As spiritual beings, our souls need light. Unfortunately all we have is darkness. The Bible on multiple occasions describes the sinful state of mankind as "darkness" or "blindness." (John 8:12; Acts 26:17,18; 2 Corinthians 4:4,6; Luke 10:23) And it's true. People for centuries have been groping about trying to find the "answer" to that internal question: "What will happen to me after I die?" People try to find the answers in the dark. They haven't been enlightened. They don't know where to go. They can't see the correct path to take. And so, sadly, because people have not seen the light, they will live in darkness their entire lives.

Thank goodness you're not one of them, right? Unfortunately, you don't crave light like you should, either. Darkness isn't just some inconvenience. People have also learned how to use darkness for their own self-satisfying desires. There's a reason thieves and robbers don't break into homes at noon. People all around us crouch in front of a computer in the darkness, with the warm glow of the screen enveloping them, looking and lusting at images and videos of adulterous people doing adulterous

acts. These people like the darkness. It hides their actions. Any police officer will tell you that the night shift is much more busy than the day shift. Criminals and shady people operate at night, under the cover of darkness. Darkness conceals things; it hides things; it makes us difficult to find. And so while the physical side of us needs light, we crave darkness. Darkness satisfies our sinful selves and helps hide our hellish acts.

When high definition television came out about a decade ago, the television and movie studios had a big problem. The definition of the televisions in HD was so good that the makeup and lighting of shows created in standard definition actually made the shows look bad. It exposed wrinkles, smudges, and makeup flaws so easily that many shows had to scramble to fix it. New techniques in lighting and film were created, makeup and costume artists were sought even more than before. And stars on set resorted to medical means to rid themselves of the wrinkles and lines. The HD television shed light on so many things. It made sports clearer and sharper. It made movies crisp and clean. And it made actors look old and wrinkly.

So, as sinful people, we don't like the light. We don't like the light because it exposes exactly who we are. We don't like to see ourselves in the full spotlight of God's Law. It shows every wrinkle, every blemish, every stain. It reveals not just the outer layers of who we are—the public sins and disgraces. But the light of God's law reveals who we are to our very core: sinful people plunged into the darkness of sin. And so we avoid the light. We don't like the light. The light makes us feel uncomfortable because it forces us to see exactly who we are. This is why Paul states in 1 Corinthians that the message of the cross "causes offense."

When someone points out your sin using God's law, don't you get offended? I don't mean the little things in life that many wouldn't even consider a sin. I'm not talking about the spot on your shirt or your fly being down. Those aren't sins. Those are just results of living in a sinful world. I'm talking about that time when someone points out to you an action or word you have done or said. I'm talking about that time that the language that came spewing out of your mouth was nowhere near the "pure and holy" benchmark, and someone called you out on it. How did you react? With emotion? With anger? With vengeance? What about that time that someone pointed out to you that your worship life has been scarce? That instead of making excuses as to why you aren't or weren't in God's house that you should do something about it. How did you react, then? Or how about that time that someone preached from the pulpit a message that we could be giving more? That we could be increasing our offerings in a way that is God-pleasing and proportionate to our giving. How did you react then? Did you snap back that it wasn't any of the church's business...? That it isn't the church's money...? That they have no right...?

Dear Christians, we don't like the light because it exposes us for who we are. It shows us our sins. It exposes the very core of our sinful, selfish, self-centered beings. And it shows us that we deserve nothing but hell.

But light does more than just expose things. Light also shows us the way. Imagine yourself on a dark, moonless night on a road outside of the city. There's no moon, no street lights. The only light you have is the soft glow of your dashboard and the headlights on the front of your vehicle. Then you shut them off. What do you see? Then let's say you get a phone call saying there's an emergency in town and you need to get back. You try to turn your headlights back on, but they don't work. They've broken. You need to get back to town and you have no light to guide you. How do you feel? Hopeless? Scared? Lost? We can try to get back without them, but the chances of us making it back without putting the car in the ditch is pretty slim. The darkness blinds us. Without light we won't last very long on our journey.

Dear Christian, you are on a journey through life. Paul calls it a race. The world through which you journey is filled with darkness. People are groping about, trying to keep their life on the road to salvation. But without a light, people are putting their lives in the ditch. Maybe you've seen it in your own lives. But we have Christ. He told his disciples, "I am the light of the world..." We have a guide in this life—God's Word. The Psalmist tells us, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path..."

But Jesus is more than just a good luck charm or a handy tool. Jesus is our Savior. Jesus came to this dark world and lived in it. But he never once put his life in the ditch. Not once did he wander off the path. Not once did he succumb to the darkness of this earth. Oh, he was tempted to! The writer to the Hebrews tells us that he was "tempted in every way, just as we are." But there was one big difference: "he was without sin." He may have been tempted to lust. He may have been tempted to respond in anger or vengeance. He may have been tempted to use foul and sinful language. He may have been tempted to neglect God and his Word. But he never once caved. He never sinned. And so because he never sinned we can trust those words from the cross: "It is finished." There was nothing more that needed to be done. He had finished the work we could not. He had journeyed through life without a single sin when we couldn't. And he gave that to you.

You see, light—as bad as it can be—also leads us to realize that we are saved from our wretched selves. It makes us realize that we need a savior. It makes us realize that there is hope in God.

So, dear Christian, crave the light. Search it out. Dig for it in the Word. Eagerly hear it, learn it, take it to heart. Taste it this morning in the blessed sacrament. And trust that despite the sin-exposing nature of light, that God has wiped you clean of all guilt and shame and made you his dear child. Amen.



*Soli Deo Gloria!*

© 2015 Rev. Nathanael P. Seelow