

Jesus is the Light of Salvation for all people – a light for the Gentiles – for you and for me. Amen.

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— ¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— ¹⁶ the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” ¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

¹⁸ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.

²¹ Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Are you disciples of Christ? Many of us would hesitate to answer that question. Are we? We might call ourselves Christians or Lutherans, but to be a disciple of someone seems to imply a more serious commitment. Well, you are disciples of Christ whether you realize it or not and as we consider this portion of scripture, we want to take a look at, **“What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ?”** As Jesus speaks to us through the Gospel of Matthew, he will show us that a disciple of Christ is, **“One who recognizes Jesus as Savior,” “One who repents of their sins,”** and as a result, **“One who follows their Savior.”**

I. These 1st few verses of our sermon text set the stage for us. John the Baptist had been preparing the way for Jesus by preaching a message of repentance and baptizing people to bring them the gift of faith and forgiveness. He did this through most of the 1st year of Jesus ministry but then he had a run in with King Herod and Herod threw him into prison. It was time for John to fade into the background. He had completed his mission of preparing the way for Jesus and it was time for Jesus to become more prominent in his ministry.

During Jesus 1st year of ministry he was baptized by John, tempted by the devil in the desert and changed water into wine at the wedding in Cana. He also talked to Nicodemus as recorded in John chapter 3. During this time Jesus may have been in Judea but with the Pharisees paying more attention to him, it was time to head north to Galilee. There was still a lot to do before he would make his final journey to Jerusalem and to the cross.

I think many people felt the Promised Messiah would spend time in Judea and Jerusalem and yet, if they paid attention to the Old Testament prophecies, they would realize that there was a need for the Savior to spend time in Galilee. Matthew quotes Isaiah, **“Land of Zebulun and**

land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— ¹⁶ the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

The people living in the region of Galilee were living in darkness. They weren't any worse than any other sinner but they were living in the darkness of their sins. Being in the darkness of their sins also caused them to be living in the shadow of death. A shadow is an indication of what is coming next and if the people continued in the darkness of sin they were headed towards spiritual death.

Their environment didn't help them when it came to their spiritual lives. Some Canaanites lived in the region and many of God's people had been wiped out by the Assyrians. Capernaum was on a trading crossroads and so there were many foreign influences which brought different forms of idolatry to the region.

Fortunately, Matthew tells us that a "Great Light" has come into their lives. This "Great Light" is Jesus who shines through the darkness of sin with the Gospel of God's Word. Darkness was the forerunner of death but this light came to bring life. We could say that Jesus came to bring life to the people sitting in darkness.

In a lot of ways, we are like the people in the region of Capernaum. We have all these worldly influences around us: The government which promotes homosexuality, same sex marriage, and abortion. Friends and co-workers that try to draw us away from worship with weekend activities and encouragement to measure everything by the standards of the world. Society in general that pushes us to make everything but God a priority. Just as the people in Capernaum had all these outside influences so also do we. They weren't bad people and neither are we, but too often we let the darkness of sin creep into our lives.

But thank God that Jesus has become a great light in our lives. From the moment we were baptized he has shined his light into our hearts and removed the darkness of our sins by bringing us forgiveness. That is why it is so important to listen to his message, not only today but every day. So what is that all important message? **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near?”**

II. Such a simple message that carries a lot of meaning. We don't always care to hear the word repent because it directs us to reflect on ourselves and what we have done. However, if we take it to heart, it produces sorrow over our sins and a plea for God's mercy. But that word repent also prompts us to make change in our lives – to turn away from the temptations that so easily trap us into sinning and lets face it, we don't like to change.

But there is a reason to change – the kingdom of heaven is near. That was John's message as he prepared the way for Jesus and that was our Savior's message as he prepared the people for his work of salvation. We might say that the kingdom of heaven has come as we think about Jesus and how he has redeemed our sins on the cross and we can also say that we are part of the kingdom of heaven because of the faith that is in our hearts.

Through faith in Jesus, he still resides in our hearts. Because of our faith in Jesus we still yearn to hear him speak to us through his Word and we look to him to bring us strength when we need it and peace and comfort as well. And as a child of God we are waiting for our Savior to come again to remove the darkness of our sins from our hearts forever.

No one likes to talk about sin or even repentance and yet those things are so important for us to see, because as we take an honest look at ourselves, it helps us to see the love of our Savior that much better. As we confess the sins that darken our hearts, we look to Jesus to replace the darkness with the light of forgiveness and he does. And that all has an impact on our lives. It changes how we approach life and how we live our lives.

III. The disciples interacted with Jesus on occasion throughout his 1st year of ministry but they were not always with him. Now, at this time, their relationship with Jesus is about to change. Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James and John to follow him. Not just to hang out with him physically but to look to him as their teacher and to spend all their time with him listening and learning. With the call to follow him, Jesus was inviting these men to be his students – his disciples and they readily agreed.

Jesus has called us to be his disciples as well. To make him the center of our lives as we listen to him, study his Word and look to him to guide us in our lives. He loved us first so that we can love him by following him and obeying him as best we can. We love him because his work opens heaven to us and brings us forgiveness for our sins, life and salvation.

What does it mean to be a disciple? It means to recognize Jesus as our Savior – the one who lived a perfect life in our place and who paid for our sins. It means to come regularly to confess our sins, to repent and as forgiven children of God to try and turn from temptation. It means to follow our Savior – to listen to him speak to us, to study his Word and to share what we know when the opportunity arises.

A great light has come into our lives and has shone in our hearts. May we look to our Savior to burn brightly in our hearts and may we take every opportunity to follow him and share him with others. Amen.