

Out from the Shadows – Matthew 4:13-17/Isaiah 8:16-9:8

Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
Union Baptist Church – 10/7/2018

I. INTRODUCTION

I want to share with you a real-life story today to begin. Mindy and I were in the early stages of our home remodel on North Main Street. I had just finished a week and a half of repairing the 100-year-old wood floors and then sanding off at least three layers of paint. The pressure was on to wrap up the project so we could start using the first floor of the house and not have to go outside through the snow and freezing temperatures to get from the kitchen to the upstairs bedrooms. The final phase involved staining the floor and then adding at a couple layers of polyurethane. Up to this point I had been apprenticing under Mr. Joe Wing, who had recently done the same thing at his house. He'd shown me the equipment to use and demonstrated it for me. He'd given me a few pieces of wood flooring from another old house. He'd shown me how to remove damaged wood from my floors and replace it with these old boards. And things were going pretty well as I followed his instructions and used the equipment he'd recommended.

But now Mindy and I were on our own for the staining phase because the Wings had gone for the natural look in their house and hadn't used stain. So we carefully read the fine print about how to apply the stain and then started the process about 7:00 pm one evening, thinking we'd be wrapping it up by midnight or so. But the hours went by and by and by and we discovered it was a little more time consuming than we'd anticipated. As 1:00 am, 2:00 am and 3:00 am rolled by, we realized we were going to get precious little sleep that night, if any. But as we pressed on and slowly closed in on the last few sections, Mindy said, "I don't what's going on, but my eyes are really burning since we opened up that last can of stain." I hadn't noticed it yet, but soon began to feel it as well. Nevertheless we kept working and finally arrived at the very last section, at which point Mindy decided to retire for the night...at about 4:00 am.

I kept working until about 4:30 and then began cleaning up. But as I did, out of the corner of my eye I saw something strange: *a wisp of smoke*. I turned around

to investigate and realized it was coming from the rags we'd been using to apply the stain. We'd been putting them in a cardboard box in the kitchen as we used them up. And if you're a little more informed about stain than I was, you probably know exactly what was happening. I reached into the box, picked up one of the rags and the wisp of smoke turned into a column of smoke. Ever heard of spontaneous combustion? I had too, but I never thought it would happen to me! Inside the stack of rags a fire was breaking out.

I quickly grabbed the whole box of rags, flew outside and dumped them in the snow. Then I went back in the house and finally read that huge yellow warning sign on the top of the stain cans. Have you ever seen those? You see, somebody had been trying to make it very clear to me that stain needs to be handled very carefully...that there are certain principles that guide the world of stain and inevitable consequences that will result when those principles are ignored. On that huge yellow warning sign – which looked like a bright light saying, “Look at me! Look at me!” – it very clearly stated that stain can spontaneously combust and that you should never pile up rags that are saturated in stain. Instead you should immerse them in water when you're done with them. I had ignored that simple and clear and prominently displayed message and lo and behold, it was true! And by ignoring it I came very close to burning down my whole house.

Keep this simple story in mind as we move into our study of Scripture today and you'll soon see its relevance. Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 4, verses 13 to 22. For those of you visiting today, or who've just joined us recently, we're moving chronologically through the life of Christ, taking into account all 4 gospels and harmonizing them together to get a full picture of who Jesus is – what he's like and what he taught us about life in God's kingdom.

As we pick up in the life of Christ today, we find that he has just left his hometown of Nazareth, after the people in the Jewish synagogue – though amazed at his godly teaching and wisdom and the reports they'd heard about miracles he'd performed – got offended, formed a mob and tried to throw him off a cliff when he uncovered their intention to reject him as the Messiah, unless he proved himself in Nazareth with more signs and miracles. And as Jesus not so subtly compared them to rebellious Israel of the Old Testament, who had rejected God's message to them through the prophets and even killed some of them. But as these people in Nazareth tried to kill Jesus, God of course had other plans, and

Scripture records that Jesus simply passed through the midst of the angry mob and went his way.

So let's begin now by reading our passage for today, verses 13 to 17 of Matthew chapter 4:

13 And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

15 "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—16 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."

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

II. ADOPTING A NEW HOMETOWN (Matthew 4:13)

Well, we first see here that Jesus was adopting a new hometown, the town of Capernaum, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Rejected by Nazareth, he moved to Capernaum. This adoption by Jesus of Capernaum as his new hometown and base of operations was so complete that Matthew later called it Jesus' own city (see Matthew 9:1). Capernaum was by the sea in the territory set aside for the tribes Zebulun and Naphtali, and was in the region that had historically been labeled, *Galilee of the Gentiles*. It had received that label because it was one of the areas where the Canaanites had not been fully removed from the land as God had commanded. Gentiles persisted extensively in Galilee alongside the Israelites.

Additionally, Galilee, after the reign of King Solomon, became part of the divided Northern Kingdom of Israel, which was ruled by an unbroken line of kings who were in full rebellion against God. As such it was a place of darkness in the sense that most people either lived completely ignorant of the one true God and how the universe and the people he created are meant to operate...or in full, conscious rebellion against him as they rejected his Word as revealed through Moses. In other words, Galilee was a place where most people were ignoring that

big yellow sticker on the stain can and experiencing the inevitable consequences of doing so.

III. PERILS OF LIFE IN THE DARK (Matthew 4:14; Isaiah 8:16-22)

Well, we notice in verse 14 that as Jesus followed the Spirit's lead and the Spirit communicated the Father's will, even the place Jesus chose to live took on significance and brought about the fulfillment of a prophecy from Isaiah chapter 9. I want to take you back for a good portion of today's study to that Isaiah passage where the prophecy in verses 15 to 16 of Matthew 4 originated. Keep your finger in Matthew 4, but then turn back to Isaiah chapters 8 and 9. We're going to read Isaiah chapter 8, verse 16 through Isaiah chapter 9, verse 7, but I want to do it in two parts. First let's read chapter 8, verses 16 through 22, which I've labeled in your notes: *Perils of Life in the Dark*.

16 Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples. 17 I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. 18 Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. 19 And when they say to you, "Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter," should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? 20 To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. 21 They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. 22 And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.

This is such an interesting picture we get here. On the one hand we see that God's testimony, God's teaching has been available for all to see and understand how life in his created universe works. And if you think of history as recorded in Scripture you see how God since creation has continually been sharing himself and reaching out to lost people and communicating his ways and how life in his universe works. Remember from last week, Jesus, the Word – the One who in his essence communicates and shares himself and speaks to us of who God is. And

he's been doing this in so many ways throughout history. He even ensured that his Word was written down in the Bible so people from generation to generation could know exactly who God is and how to be in relationship with him. The problem is not a lack of information, but the rejecting and ignoring of that readily available information... much like I ignored that bright yellow sticker on the stain can.

And that was just what was happening during the time of Isaiah. God's testimony and teaching had been ignored and rejected by the majority of the Israelites for so long, that their relationship with God was completely broken down. God was actually hiding his face from them until they would turn back to his testimony and teaching and repent of their rejection of it. Until that would happen, God says to bind up the testimony, seal it among my disciples. Keep it available only for those who are paying attention to it and seeking to follow it. In other words, these people have continually rejected it, so take it away from them until they discover how much they need it...how harmful and miserable life in this universe is when you ignore the principles on which it was built and the person who's holding it all together...when you live life in the dark about what's really true.

You probably noticed that Isaiah gives us a pretty stark picture of what life is like for those who live in the dark, rejecting and ignoring the truth God has made so available to us. Look again at verses 21 and 22:

21 They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. 22 And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.

You see, it's very dangerous to feel your way through life in complete darkness. Imagine if all the lights, including the sun and stars, went completely out on earth and we had to get navigate our way through complete darkness every waking hour. Life would be very slow and very dangerous, wouldn't it? And probably very short. Yet this is what it's like when we ignore and reject God's testimony and teaching and try to re-write truth with him out of the picture. What's true remains true and we end up living our lives by a lie, with devastating

consequences. What's the solution according to our passage in Isaiah? Quite simple actually: ***To the teaching and to the testimony!*** God has made the truth available to all. Seek it out, use it and discover how God's universe works and how he can lead you through this broken world in endurance and patience with joy!

IV. THE COMING DAWN OF LIGHT (Isaiah 9:1-7)

Well, even though at this point in history God was temporarily hiding his face from the rebellious Israelites until they recognized their need for him again, he wasn't done trying to communicate himself and what's true and to show to both them and the rest of the world the way out of life in the dark. And through Isaiah, God revealed that he was soon planning to do this in a big way. Let's see what he had planned in Isaiah chapter 9, verses 1 through 7, which I've called: *The Coming Dawn of Light*.

1 But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. 2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. 3 You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. 4 For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. 5 For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

God is zealous and relentless in his efforts to reveal himself to the world and invite those he's created and is continually giving breath and life back into his

arms. Though the vast majority of people throughout history had continually gone their own way and chosen life in the dark instead of life in God's light, our merciful, outgoing, never-giving up God, was going to bring a bright shining light to cut through the darkness and reveal even more clearly who God is, what he's like, and how every person can leave the darkness behind to live in God's light... a place where our difficult lives begin to make sense and God provides the truth, wisdom, strength and power so desperately needed. God was going to do this by sending the true light, his only Son, who would be known by these descriptive names: *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*. Doesn't that sound like someone you want to be with and walk through life with? This is Jesus, and there's nothing better than living with him and following him around through life as his apprentice and friend!

V. THE DARK SHADOW OF DEATH (Matthew 4:16)

Well, this passage in Isaiah is where the prophecy that Jesus fulfilled in Matthew 4 originated and the background we need to understand it. So turn back to Matthew now and let's consider for a few more minutes what we learn there. First of all, as we look at verse 16, we notice that the people in darkness are dwelling there. The original Greek conveys the idea of sitting in darkness. We get the picture that the people living in darkness have accepted it as the only way to live life. It's all they've known and it seems normal to them. They're comfortable and at home there and perhaps even unaware that they're living in the dark. To put in different terms: unaware that they're living their whole lives based on principles that are not true and are leading them down a destructive and painful path that ultimately leads to death.

Secondly, notice also that these people are living in the region and the shadow of death. They're living in the place where sin and its inevitable effects are affecting everything in their lives, casting the dark shadow of death over everything. Again, it's like me ignoring that bright yellow sticker shouting at me on the top of the stain can, and thereby burning my eyes and starting a fire in my house that will eventually burn it down if I don't stop and read that sticker and figure out how stain works. Many Scriptures come to mind here:

Proverbs 14:12

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

Romans 5:12

...death spread to all men because all sinned—

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death...

Sin is basically trying to remove God from the picture and living out of step with the way he built the universe and designed its people to operate. And living life according to faulty and erroneous principles will always bring pain and failure and eventually death if carried to its full potential.

VI. THE GREAT LIGHT DAWNS (Matthew 4:15-16)

So here we have people sitting in darkness, living life in a way that leads to death. But there in that darkness a light breaks through. The great light dawns! Imagine how painful that would be to your eyes at first...when you've been in complete darkness and suddenly a great light appears. The light hurts the eyes at first and when we experience that pain we have two choices: we can turn away from it or cover our eyes or put a blanket over our heads, but then we remain stuck in darkness. OR, we can deal with the temporary pain as we squint and keep looking toward the light, allowing our eyes to adjust. And only with this second option will we discover the path to freedom that the light uncovers.

Isn't that a helpful way to think about the light Jesus shines? He is the great light, the light that has dawned. As his light dawns in our lives it's painful to see ourselves as we really are...to see our sin uncovered and the painful truth that we've been living a lie. When that happens we can run from the pain in shame and humiliation and do everything we can to pretend it's not true and cover everything back up. Or we can embrace the painful truth in humility and honesty – a place known as repentance – letting Christ's light shine on us in all its brightness and warmth...hurting our eyes at first, but then bringing that wonderful warmth of the morning sun hitting our bodies and revealing the path to life in the light...life connected with our Creator and guided by what's really true about the universe he created.

And I want you to notice one final truth in verses 15 and 16. This prophecy from Isaiah, as we've already noted, was for Galilee *of the Gentiles*. The great light

dawned not just for the Israelites, but for all people stuck sitting in darkness. And that light dawned ON them and it was FOR them. Have you ever seen rays of sun breaking through the clouds on a dark day, but it's happening far away from where you are? It's a beautiful sight, but it doesn't benefit you personally. You're just reminded that you're in a dark place, but somewhere else it's sunny and warm. But that's not the case with this light. These rays of sun breaking through thick clouds are shining down on all people living in darkness. Jesus Christ has broken through the clouds on all people and the warmth and brightness of his rays are for all people. There's no one excluded from the opportunity to soak up and live in the warmth of the light of Christ. And there's no better place to be, my friends.

VII. THE INVITATION TO LIGHT-FILLED LIFE (Matthew 4:17)

But Jesus isn't going to make anyone stay there in his light. Every person has the freedom when the light of Christ breaks through the clouds to turn away and hide and run back into the darkness. We saw this happen in Nazareth, didn't we? When light that was for them broke through the clouds, they hid from it and even tried to make it stop shining. And with that choice they remained in the dark and missed the opportunity to enjoy the light-filled life being offered to them.

But even those of us who have accepted Jesus as the light and begun to live in his light can sometimes try to retreat back into the darkness. We can retreat back into a place where we try to hide pockets of sin in our lives from others and even from God, or where we feel that we can't be real about our struggles...A dark place where we're deceived by Satan's lie that "Christians need to have it all together"...that we need to act like we're happy all the time and that if we're struggling we need to keep it to ourselves and try to convince everyone that everything's peachy...Or perhaps a dark place where we justify our sin and make excuses and even deny it when confronted.

Well, may I suggest to you and remind myself that to live that way is to return to life in the darkness. It's a place Satan would love to bring us back to. He wants us thinking we're alone in our struggles; that we can't be real with our fellow believers; that we've gone too far and God's love for us is wavering; that honesty will bring shame and rejection; that we can't change and our struggles are just part of who we are; that God is mad at us and punishing us for our failures or lack

of faith; that coming into the light will be too painful. Satan wants us beating ourselves up and remaining stuck and trying to find our way out by our own willpower and human wisdom.

But did you know there's a much better way...a way made possible by Jesus Christ on the cross. This way is founded on the true and unshakable reality that Jesus Christ has paid in full for all the sins, past present and future, of all those people who have trusted him for salvation. And that for these people who have walked into his light, there is now nothing...did you hear me?...NOTHING that can now separate them from the love that is in Christ Jesus our Lord...no sin, no doubts, no despair, no depression...NOTHING! God's love for us and his feelings of affection for us and his desire for our good do not change or fluctuate based on how we're doing. We are accepted, loved, secure and significant to God through Christ forever, no matter what mistakes or poor choices or blatant sins we've committed or struggles with despair or doubt we've faced or are facing right now. Do you believe that today?

Does that mean our sins or the lies we're believing don't matter or don't affect us or shouldn't be dealt with? Hopefully our message today has answered that question for you. Living life out of step with God and the principles and truths that govern his universe always hurts and brings harm to ourselves and others. But our sins and struggles never change the deep and profound Father love God has for us and his good intentions to free us from those destructive ways of thinking and living. And he's provided for us a simple way to deal with these challenges and sins when they crop up and get back on the path to freedom. It's called honesty and repentance.

Notice in verse 17 what Jesus began to preach in Capernaum as his light dawned. He simply said, "Repent." When Jesus' light shines on us and exposes who we really are, should we run and hide? Should we cower in fear? Should we sit there and beat ourselves up and try harder? No. Just be honest and if it's a sin issue, repent. Stop trying to justify it, or hide it, or deny it. That will always keep you from resolving it. Just let Christ's light shine on it, ask for his forgiveness and then ask him to guide you to a better way. And I emphasize honesty as well as repentance because sometimes our struggles are feeling-based and are not necessarily sin that we need to repent of. Sometimes we're just feeling discouraged and sad about the difficulties of life and that's not a sin folks. Life is

hard and it's OK to feel sad and discouraged and sorrowful about the difficult things we see and experience. But we do need to be honest with God and others about what we're feeling and allow God to help us work through it, discover any lies we may be believing and provide us with what we need to press on.

But I want to tell you that when you practice honesty and repentance in the challenges you face, you don't need to spend any time beating yourself up for them or dwelling on them or feeling like a terrible person. If that's what's happening, you're listening to and believing Satan's lies. Now there may be things God is calling you to do to fully resolve the situation and demonstrate the fruits of true repentance... like going to apologize to someone you've hurt, or spending time thinking about why you did what you did and making a plan about how to change your thinking and activities to avoid doing it again in the future. But when we come into Christ's light in simple honesty and repentance, we can move on and stop wallowing and spend our efforts instead seeking God for his wisdom, power and strength so we can start living life by his truth instead of the lies of the world. We can be like Paul:

Philippians 3:13-21

...forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)

May we each accept Jesus' invitation to light-filled life, connected with God in his kingdom, secure in his unchanging love, and completely free to be honest and vulnerable and real and to move quickly to repentance whenever needed. The great Light has dawned and called us out from the shadows. Let's stay there in his warm and life-giving light!