

Repent, For Isaiah's Light Is Near – Matthew 4:12-23

6 months and 12 days. It's been 6 months and 12 days now that I have called Tucson home once again. 6 months and 12 days I've been able to learn your names and your stories without forgetting them too much hopefully. It was 6 months and 12 days ago that we found myself here, on July 10th, receiving my ordination to serve you as one of your spiritual shepherds. And while a lot has happened since then, it also seems some things are still taking their time. If you were to look into my office, you would probably think that I just moved in since there's really nothing on the walls. Although I have a pile of things to hang up, I just haven't gotten around to it since I've had too much fun serving you as your pastor. But I have hung two things. One is a wooden plaque from my grandparents with the words of Proverbs 3:5 carved into it **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart."** The other thing is last week's worship folder. If you remember from Pastor Koehler's sermon, he encouraged us to take the worship folder home and place it in a visible place so that we remember that God has made us his light in this dark world. And what better place for me to do this than to put the worship folder on the wall in my office? This way I will always remember that God has made me his light.

And it's this idea of light that we'll consider this morning as well. But we're going to do it through the eyes of history. In the words from Matthew's Gospel that we're looking at this morning, he includes a quotation from Isaiah chapter 9 to show us that Jesus is the fulfillment of the light promised to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. And as we look at that light and feel its comforting warmth, we joyfully repent as we follow our Lord.

700 years before Jesus set up camp in Capernaum, the prophet Isaiah spoke these words. **"Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—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 land of Zebulun and Naphtali, where Nazareth and Capernaum are located, were along the way to the Sea of Galilee. And it's here in Matthew chapter 4 where we see Isaiah's light fulfilled in our Savior Jesus. After Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been thrown into prison for speaking out against Herod for his sin of adultery, Jesus went back north to Galilee, to the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. And after a brief stay in Nazareth, he went to the big city of Capernaum which was along the Sea of Galilee. Jesus would spend a long time in and around

Capernaum preaching and teaching the people that he was the promised light from Isaiah chapter 9.

Do you think the people around Capernaum would have connected the dots on their own? That this Jesus who was preaching, teaching, and healing around the Sea of Galilee was the promised light of the prophet Isaiah? While I can't say for sure, but I'm willing to guess few if any would have. This is one reason why I'm happy Matthew clearly spells this out for us. But I'm willing to guess that even the people who knew about Isaiah chapter 9 would not have connected the dots right away because they probably thought that God had forgotten them. I mean if you think about it, it was 700 years earlier that Isaiah spoke these words. And in the time since then the Northern Kingdom was utterly destroyed, God had shifted his attention to Jerusalem and the Southern Kingdom, and the land was full of Gentiles who added their worship and beliefs to the few remaining Jews. It must have seemed that God had forgotten about his promise in Isaiah chapter 9! But God didn't forget his promise to these hopeless people. He sent Jesus to be Isaiah's promised light. God never forgets any of his promises and on top of that he will always come true on them.

Do you sometimes think that God has forgotten his promises for you? Maybe it's when you read through the Bible and see prophecies like Isaiah's fulfilled centuries later you think *"While that may be all great and wonderful for them, it's not for me. It's been far longer than 700 years that Jesus preached, taught, and healed around Capernaum. Plus America wasn't even on the map back then! There's no way the promises of the Bible apply to me. Why if anything, it seems like God has forgotten about me."* If we think something like this, we're treading on thin ice. Because once we doubt God's faithfulness for us, it's not too far of a jump to think that God forgot to have Jesus' death and resurrection include us. But I ask you this – why would we ever doubt God's loving power? If he can fulfill a prophecy 700 years later to a people who have completely rejected him, what's an extra 1,000 years for an Almighty God for people who trust in him? For as sure as God shined Isaiah's Light in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, so he will shine this light to you and cast away whatever shadows of death surround you.

And if you have outside at all these past few cloudy and cold days, you know how wonderful that light can be. In the 6 months and 12 days that I have lived here in Tucson now, I now take notice when it's cloudy because I'm so used to the sun's light shining on me. Because with the sun's light comes its warmth. In

the same way that the sun's light brings its welcome warmth so does Isaiah's light bring our Savior's wonderful warmth to us. We feel that warmth ourselves when the pastor or another Christian says "*your sins are forgiven*" and we are refreshed with the promise of eternal life in heaven. But do you know why Isaiah's light brings you warmth? It's because of what Jesus did at the cross and later on Easter.

Jesus never should have been on that cross! He lived a perfect life and never should have died at all. But he did. He died on the cross for all the times we have doubted God's love for us. He died for the times we think that God has forgotten about us or that his Bible doesn't matter to us. He died in our place so he could conquer death in our place. And when he rose from the grave on Easter morning, Jesus showed to the whole world that he indeed has the power to cast aside every shadow of death. Not just for himself, not just for the people who lived in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, but for the entire world including today.

We have seen Isaiah's light shining on us who live in the shadow of death and we have felt his wonderful warmth. For that warmth is the assurance that all of our sins are forgiven. It is the promise that we will rise from the dead and live with our eternal Light in heaven. And we get to feel this wonderful warmth of Isaiah's light whenever we come to the Bible. And you know what else we do when we come to the Bible? We get to see what Jesus is talking about in Matthew's summary of Jesus' preaching and teaching where he writes "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.**"

What would you say the kingdom of heaven is? If you say that it's heaven itself, you're partially correct. The full definition of the *kingdom of heaven* is – wherever God is ruling through his Word. It is wherever God's Word is being taught and as a result God is present through the Holy Spirit. This certainly includes heaven because that is where God himself is and all those who have passed away believing in Jesus as their Savior. But we also have the kingdom of heaven in our hearts.

Have you thought about that before? How you have God supernaturally living within you through the faith he has given you? The Apostle Paul speaks about this in very clear terms in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 "**Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?**" We have the kingdom of heaven within us because we believe in God's Word.

It is in this Word we learn that Jesus is Isaiah's light to shine on those in the shadow of death. It is through the Word we appreciate the warmth of this light

because of what Jesus did for us at the cross and empty grave. It is by the Word that the kingdom of heaven comes to us. And it because of the Word that we joyfully live continual lives of repentance as Jesus' first disciples did.

As Jesus walked along the Sea of Galilee, he came across 2 sets of brothers. The first was Simon Peter and Andrew. The second was James and John. They were all fishermen and busy at work when Jesus found them. But notice how quickly and joyfully they left everything behind to follow Jesus. They believed that Jesus was Isaiah's light to cast aside the shadow of death. So when Jesus said **"Come, follow me...and I will make you fishers of men"** what else would we expect them to do but to drop everything to follow the Light himself? For it is in Jesus we have the warmth of his love and the light of his forgiveness.

We know the same joy the disciples had because we too believe that Jesus our warm wondrous light. But if you want to continue in that joy for the rest of your life, what must you do? Repent. Repent of your sins by being genuinely sorry for them. Then trust in God's sure promise to warm you up with the light of his forgiveness. That is what repentance is all about. And once you've done this, walk in the opposite direction away from your sins. But as you walk and follow Isaiah's prophesied Light, let it be with a hop in your step and joy in heart. For you are forgiven of all your sins. God has warmed you up with the light of his Son who gave himself up on the cross for you and paved the way to heaven with his resurrection. He has come to you through his Word to bring the kingdom of heaven to you and all other believers. And he has promised you that whenever you come to him in repentance, he will be there for you. Not to beat you down and leave you behind in the shadow of death. But to lift you up and embrace you with the light of his forgiveness.

So as you step out from here today, go as the disciples followed Jesus— with joyful hearts and gladly repenting so they could always bask in Isaiah's promised Light. Shine with God's light wherever the Lord has placed you in this world. And as you do so, look back to Isaiah's promised light. God has not nor will he ever forget you. He will always be with you. Amen.