



## **Matthew 4:13–16**

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 of the Sea, beyond 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.”

Of all of the four gospels, Matthew's one is the most Jewish. In today's passage we find the sixth direct quote from the Old Testament, the Jewish Scriptures, not to count the many other allusions. But even though his gospel is the most Jewish, Matthew wants to make something very clear. Jesus, the King of the Jews, the Jewish Messiah hasn't come just to save the Jewish nation, he's come to save the whole world. He's come to save both Jews and Gentiles. The word Gentile simply means non-Jew; every other nationality that isn't Jewish is lumped together in the term Gentile. Jesus has come to save both Jew and Gentile, so all people from every nation

on earth. Matthew started by showing us this in chapter one when he emphasized that Jesus's family tree, shockingly, contained foreigners. Then he was careful to mention the foreign wise men who visited Jesus at his birth, the Magi, even though no other gospel mentions them except his. And then Matthew quotes John the Baptism preaching to proud Jews 'I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham' referring to Gentiles being invited into God's family. And you know this emphasis keeps building right throughout Matthew's gospel which ends with the Great Commission, the climax of the gospel and Jesus' last words to his followers before he returns to heaven, his Great Commission to them, in Matthew 28:18–20:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go

and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

And so we see that even in this the most Jewish gospel, right up front, and at the very end, and everywhere in between Matthew makes it clear to us that the gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone, for both Jew and Gentile, Jesus has come to save not just the Jewish nation but the whole world.

And so we shouldn't be surprised to read in today's passage that the King of the Jews, Israel's Messiah begins his ministry in Galilee of the Gentiles. You'll see that verse 13 mentions a brief stop-over in Nazareth before Je-

Jesus goes to live in Capernaum as his base for ministry to the region. Matthew doesn't mention what happened in Nazareth but we read in Luke 4 that Jesus went first to his hometown Nazareth where his mother and brothers and sisters still lived. He got up to preach in the Jewish synagogue but when he preached that his ministry would include the Gentiles they were so angry that they tried to kill him by throwing him off a cliff. And so Jesus moved to Capernaum which became his new hometown.

So the King of the Jews begins and bases his ministry in Galilee of the Gentiles which, Matthew is at pains to point out, is again fulfillment of Scripture – and so he quotes the first two verses of Isaiah 9. And they are beautiful verses aren't they – especially verse 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.”

This verse is so evocative I'd like us to use our imagination to fully appreciate it. Imagine living in darkness, fumbling around, bumping into things, eking out the best existence you can, not knowing what's around the corner, living in fear of the future. Imagine living in darkness, being in the dark as to the purpose of life, seeing yourself as an accident of evolution, having no real importance, here for a time and then gone forever. Imagine living in darkness.

And imagine deep down knowing that that darkness is actually the shadow of death. Your whole life lived under the shadow and fear of death. Making the most of all your fumbling around because at the end of eighty

years or sooner if you're unlucky, when your number's up, death will finally take you and you'll be no more. Fumbling, and stumbling, and trying to block it out, and then one day soon death comes knocking at your door and that's it.

And now imagine living in darkness and quiet despair, and then seeing for the first time a great light. All of a sudden the darkness is exposed, contrasted against this light, and through the light the whole world made clear – you can finally see, you didn't even know you were blind, but now you can finally see. The shadow of death no longer blinds you, and what's more this new light that has dawned offers more than just seeing clearly, this new light offers an alternative to death. No longer the shadow of death and then the darkness of death but instead eternal life has dawned and soon it will be blazing in all its

brightness overhead. Such a powerful and evocative imagery in this verse.

And you know it would have been even more powerful to people in Jesus' day because they lived under the shadow of death. Average life expectancy was around 25 years of age, infant mortality ran at about 50%. A common cold or a fever was like a death sentence. Death was everywhere. But then Jesus came. And he healed the sick and he raised the dead and then he died on a cross and rose from the dead showing all the world that he has power over death. In Jesus a new light has dawned and he means that we no longer need to live under the shadow of death. And this changes everything.

Today, perhaps more than ever, we're conscious of this shadow of death. We're living longer than ever but when you think about



how obsessed we are with body image, how we fixate on eternal youth through diet and exercise and cosmetic surgery it's clear that this shadow of death is still very present in the modern mind. And this isn't to mention the paralysing fear that most of us have at the thought of a premature cancer diagnosis. Or the way our society has done its best to institutionalise death, hiding our elderly from sight, away in nursing homes, trying to help us all forget that in the end death is the destiny of each and every one of us.

But Jesus changes all of this. In him a new light has dawned. We no longer need to fear death which means that we can properly enjoy life. Because of him we have nothing to fear, not ageing, not cancer, not the end of life. Because Jesus has defeated death we can be confident that we are going to live forever and that changes everything. And it rais-

es some interesting questions. If you're going to live forever, what's the rush? If you're going to live forever, why use up every single moment trying to experience everything, achieve everything, see everything? Instead, why not slow down, and enjoy life and people and relationships, and then focus on the only thing that is really important which is sharing the good news of Jesus with as many people as possible before the shadow of death catches up with them?

A life lived under the shadow of death and a life lived under the promise of eternal life couldn't be more different. And so questions like these come to mind. Does your life look different to the lives of your friends who don't know Jesus? If it did look more different do you think they might be more interested in him? Has eternal life change the way you approach your life today? Take some time now

to think about these questions and our passage of Scripture and then pray about them.

Tomorrow Jesus begins to preach, I hope you can join me then.