

Matthew
Jesus' Strategic Ministry Home
Matthew 4:12-16
May 4, 2025
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Well, this morning we come to a passage in Matthew's Gospel that describes Jesus as the Light.

When I think about light, my mind goes immediately to our sun, which is truly astonishing.

They tell us that 99.86% of all of the mass in our solar system is made up by our sun. Every planet, as you know, every moon, every asteroid in the solar system, revolves around this one blazing star. And it generates an incredible amount of energy, fusing six-hundred-million tons of hydrogen every second. The light that it generates travels ninety-three-million miles to reach us, taking eight minutes and twenty seconds to arrive on Earth. The surface of the sun is about ten-thousand degrees Fahrenheit. But its atmosphere, or its corona, they tell us, is more than a million degrees. The sun is huge; its diameter from one side of the sun, if you could travel through the middle to the other side of the sun, would be eight-hundred-sixty-four-thousand miles. Just to give you a perspective about how large that is, if the sun were a bowling ball, this Earth would be a poppy seed.

It provides us with light. It promotes the growth of every living thing on this planet. It serves as a cosmic marker of time, both days and years. And of course, it provides light and warmth to our world. But this massive blazing fireball in our daytime sky is merely a created light; think about that. As majestic and amazing as it is, it's simply created, spoken into existence by our God, which makes what Jesus says in John 8:12 even more profound when He says, "I am the Light of the world (I am the Light of the world); (and) he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." Our sun promotes growth and life; Jesus is life! The sun provides light for this physical planet, but Jesus shines into the darkness of the human soul.

The sun's light will one day be extinguished. This universe will cease to exist at the word and command of our God, but Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, He will never end! He is the eternal Light, as we learned in the end of Revelation, even of the new heavens and the new earth.

The text that we come to in Matthew's Gospel today pictures Jesus as the Sun—the Sun suddenly dawning on those who have found themselves lost in the darkest night. Friends, that's us, and that's what we learn today. Just to remind you what we've learned so far, Matthew wrote his Gospel to prove that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah of the Hebrew Scripture, the divine Savior and King. So far, we have studied the first two chapters where we learned of “The Messiah's Arrival.” We're currently considering “The Messiah's Preparation,” which begins chapter 3, and runs through the middle of chapter 4. So far in His preparation, we've considered “His Messenger,” the one sent before Him to announce Him. We've considered “His Baptism,” and its implications. We've considered “His Temptation” in chapter 4, verses 1 through 11.

Today, we come to the final part of “The Messiah's Preparation,” and that is “His Selection of His Ministry Home,” or “His Ministry Headquarters.” We find this in chapter 4, verses 12 to 16. Now, before we read and study this passage together, I first need to back up and lay out for you a brief timeline, so you know how this fits in Jesus' life. As we've discovered, Jesus was likely baptized in the late summer of 26 A.D. That was followed immediately by His forty-day temptation in the early fall of that same year. But then for almost an entire year, Jesus ministered in the south of Israel, in Judea, where Jerusalem is located. So, when you look at Matthew 4, you need to understand that between verse 11 and verse 12, almost an entire year passes. Now, Matthew doesn't record what happened during those ten to twelve months, but John does. So, think of it like this, if you put a divide between verse 11 and verse 12, and insert

John, starting with chapter 1, verse 19, through the end of chapter 4, you have a layout of Jesus' early history, His early ministry.

Let me just walk you through that briefly. After Jesus' temptation in the fall of 26 A.D., John records, first of all, "Jesus' first week of ministry." He actually gives us a week; he says the next day, and the next day, on the third day. So, he lays out the first week of Jesus' public ministry, in which "John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God." "Jesus calls His first followers" from the followers of John the Baptist. He "Performed His first miracle in Cana," where he turned water into wine. And then, "He visited Capernaum for a few days." But then, quickly, we're told that he returned to Judea.

And the next thing recorded, several months later, in the spring of 27 A.D., is "Jesus' first ministry Passover." At Passover, "He cleansed the temple for the first time." "He taught and performed miracles." "He spoke with Nicodemus," and John then comments on that conversation in the rest of chapter 3 of John. For about eight months, following that first Passover, so through most of the year 27 A.D., "Jesus joined with John in his ministry." They joined together, probably for about eight months. Jesus gathered to Himself all of those who had attached to John in anticipation of the Messiah. But at the end of 27 A.D., "John is arrested and in light of that, Jesus decides to leave for Galilee." "He travels through Samaria," John chapter 4, and, of course, there He encounters the Samaritan woman at the well; "He saves her, as well as many other Samaritans." "Jesus then, leaving Samaria, continues into Galilee." And, arriving in Galilee, "He returned to Cana," where He had turned the water into wine. And there "healed a sick child." And then Luke tells us, "He briefly returned to Nazareth." Now, all of that happened in the 12 months after Jesus' temptation, recorded in Matthew 4, verses 1 to 11, and before the text that we come to this morning. It's in the white space between verses 11 and 12.

But now let's read our text. You follow along: Matthew, chapter 4, verse 12.

Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: “THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES—THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT. AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED.”

In these verses, Matthew tells us that for the remaining two-and-a-half years of Jesus' ministry, approximately, Jesus chose to settle in Galilee and to establish His headquarters in the city called Capernaum. But his decision to do that is actually quite surprising, even perplexing. I mean, think about it for a moment, if you had never read the New Testament, but you were familiar with the Old Testament's prophecy that the Messiah would come, and I said to you, “Okay, Israel's Messiah, the eternal Son of God, is going to enter the world; where in Israel is He going to establish His ministry headquarters?” What would you say? Same thing I would say, “Oh, it's got to be Jerusalem. It's got to be the city that from the time of David until the first century was the most significant city in Israel, the place of the kings!” But that's not what Jesus did. So why did Jesus then make such an unexpected choice? Two-and-a-half years of His ministry focuses primarily on Galilee, at least two years focuses on Galilee. “Why?” Well, Matthew provides us, in our text, with several specifics that help us understand Jesus' decision and why He chose to establish His ministry home, His home and His ministry home, in the region of Galilee, and specifically in the city of Capernaum.

So, let's look at it together. The first specific that Matthew lays out here concerns “The Practical Reasons,” the practical reasons. Matthew identifies two very practical reasons for Jesus' decisions. Now, these are not the only reasons; we're going to discover there were more deeply profound spiritual reasons in a few minutes, but these are the practical reasons. First of all, Jesus chose “Galilee: Because of Herod's Arrest of John,” He chose Galilee because of Herod's arrest of John. Look at verse 12, “Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody.” “Taken into custody,” the Greek word simply means ‘to arrest;’ John had been arrested. At this point, Matthew only mentions the fact, but he doesn't give us the reason.

Later, when he comes to John's death, he gives us the reason. So, turn over, let's just get a glimpse of it, turn over to Matthew, chapter 14; Matthew 14, and look at verse 3:

For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him and put him in prison because (Here's the reason, because.) of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. For John had been saying to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.”

You're breaking God's law by having her, and we'll talk more about that when we get there. But that's the reason that Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, who inherited this part of his reign, had John the Baptist arrested.

Now, after, our text tells us, after Herod Antipas arrested John, Jesus decides to leave the south, where He's been for almost a year, and to travel north for Galilee. Now, that's not too surprising. I mean, people in our world often immigrate even to another country because of the threat of political abuse. And even within a country, people relocate because of the political climate in a particular region. I mean, let's face it, that's why some of you moved from California!

Verse 12 says, “Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee.” Now, the Greek word for ‘withdraw’ here is often used for leaving somewhere because of a potential danger. For example, in chapter 2 verse 12, this word is used when the Magi learn of Herod's scheme, and they ‘left,’ or ‘went another way,’ they ‘withdrew another way.’ It's used of Joseph, when he hears about Herod's plot to kill Jesus, he ‘left,’ he ‘withdrew’ and went to Egypt. It's also used in chapter 2 verse 22 of when Joseph decides not to settle in Bethlehem, which he really wanted to do when they came back from Egypt, but instead to move to Nazareth, he ‘left’ or ‘traveled to’ Nazareth because of the danger that Herod posed.

Now, it's not that Jesus feared being arrested by Herod; that's not why He went to Galilee. How do we know that? Because Herod Antipas, the man we're talking about, not only ruled over Judea, where he arrested John in the first century; he also ruled over Galilee. So, Jesus isn't leaving to get away from Herod. No, instead, Jesus' reason for withdrawing into Galilee had to do with another danger, a danger posed by the Pharisees. Turn over to John, chapter 4; here we learn exactly what was in Jesus' mind. John, chapter 4, verse 1:

Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John [(in other words, His ministry is getting bigger and greater than John's, who's now been arrested)] (although Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were), He left Judea and went away again into Galilee.

So, in other words, Jesus left Judea and went to Galilee, not because of Herod, but because of the Pharisees. Now, don't misunderstand, Jesus wasn't afraid of being arrested or even killed. Three years later, He set His face like flint to go to Jerusalem when He knew that was exactly what was going to happen. No, instead, He knew, on this occasion, that if He stayed in Judea, it

would only heat up the antagonism of the Pharisees toward Him and possibly might bring the crisis of crucifixion too soon. They might decide that, just like John was a threat, Jesus is now a bigger threat—"We need to have Him arrested as well." The Pharisees, driven by envy and hatred, might have Him arrested and even killed, but prematurely, before the sovereign plan of God for Jesus' life and ministry. So, about a year after His baptism, then, Jesus left Judea. He traveled to Galilee and permanently settled there. And He did so to avoid being prematurely arrested by the Pharisees, the trouble that they stir up, and bringing His life to a premature end.

Now, let me just stop here and say what Jesus does here, the process that He goes through in making this decision, is a wonderful reminder of how you and I ought to make decisions. You know, a lot of Christians have a very flawed view of what it means to make decisions in the Christian life. Please, don't think that it's mystical; don't wait for you to feel peace. That's the common phrase I grew up with, "I just feel peace that this is what I need to do." How do you know that's God? How do you know that's not your flesh? Or, how do you know that's not the pizza you had last night? You can't know that—that's extremely subjective! So, don't wait for peace. Don't wait for God to write it in the sky, for you to have a feeling in your gut that this is what you ought to do, or for God to speak to you. God doesn't do that. He speaks to us through His Word.

So, how do you make decisions? Like Jesus, we're called to make wise decisions, informed by Scripture, and decisions that take our circumstances into consideration. So, here's what you need to do. You need to pray for wisdom. You need to assess the situation, see what the Scripture says about it, look at your circumstances, seek counsel, and then make a decision. That's wise decision-making. If you aren't really clear on that, I really strongly encourage you to read one of two books. Either read Gary Friesen's book, *Decision-Making and the Will of God*, which

revolutionized my understanding of this issue many years ago when I was in college, or secondly, if you'd like a shorter book, read Kevin DeYoung's book, *Just Do Something*. Both of them make exactly the same point about how we discern God's will, how we make decisions.

Jesus chose to live in Galilee, but He also chose the city in which He would live, the city of Capernaum. Why? Because of Nazareth's rejection of Jesus. Look at verse 13, “and leaving Nazareth.” Now, the word ‘leaving’ can simply mean ‘to leave a place,’ like you’ll leave this auditorium after the service is over. It can mean simply that, but it can also mean ‘to abandon,’ ‘to leave permanently,’ which is, I think, the idea here, because we know from Luke's Gospel, that something dramatic caused this decision. Something dramatic had happened; it's an event described in Luke, chapter 4. Turn there with me, Luke, chapter 4. You remember, Jesus returns on this occasion to Nazareth, His hometown, and He reads from Isaiah; and as He reads, He speaks of what the Messiah would do.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD, (Verse 18.) IS UPON ME,
BECAUSE HE HAS ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR.
HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES,
AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND,
TO FREE THOSE WHO WERE OPPRESSED...

(Verse 20) And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. (He begins to teach, verse 21.) “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” He preaches a sermon on that text in which He rebukes them for not believing, while Gentiles, even, have believed. And what's their response? Verse 28:

And all *the people* in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which

their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. (They wanted to kill Him.)...But passing through their midst, He went His way. And He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee.

Jesus returns to the small town where He had lived for some twenty-eight years, from about two years of age until He began His ministry at thirty. He had worked there as a carpenter. He had attended synagogue school there. This was a small town, probably five-hundred or less, in other words, about the number of people as could be seated in the lower bowl of this room. These people knew Jesus. They'd known Him for twenty-eight years. He preaches this sermon in which He tells them, that spiritually, they are actually prisoners; they're not free. You know, sinners think they're free, "I can do whatever I want." No, you can't; you're a slave. That's what Jesus said to them. "You're blind. You don't see the truth. You're slaves to sin. You're prisoners" (Paraphrase). And then Jesus said, "And I am here to free you. I'm the Messiah here to set you free" (Paraphrase). And they rejected Him and wanted Him dead. So, Jesus decided to permanently leave Nazareth. Those are "The Practical Reasons" behind Jesus' decision, back in our text.

Now, that brings us to a second specific that Matthew reveals to us here, and that is "The Perplexing Choice," the perplexing choice. Look at verse 13, "Leaving Nazareth, He...settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali." Now the city of Capernaum, He says, is "by the sea," meaning "the sea," or actually more accurately, "the Lake of Galilee." Many of you, as I have, have had a chance, had a chance to be on that Lake and to see it, to experience it. He went to a city that was actually located on the northwest corner of the Sea or Lake of Galilee. The city was actually in the plot of land allocated, during the time of Joshua, to the two tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. On a map, think of it this way, Galilee (the

area) sits between the Mediterranean on the west and the Sea of Galilee on the east. It's that circle or plot of land that we call Galilee. Jesus settled there, verse 13 says. The word means 'to make your place of residence,' 'to settle down.' So, Jesus decided to move to the city of Capernaum to make it His home as well as His ministry headquarters. Why? Why Capernaum for a base of operations? And the answer is because of its strategic location.

In ancient Israel, there were three main roads that traveled north and south through Israel. First of all, there was the Ridge Road, which ran down the central ridge of the hill country. Secondly, there was the King's Highway or the Transjordan Highway, which ran from the Gulf of Aqaba in the south along the east side of the Jordan River all the way up to Damascus. And thirdly, there was the International Highway. It ran from Memphis, Egypt, all the way up to Damascus, Syria. It ran through Gaza, it ran along the coastal plain, through the Carmel Range at Megiddo, across the Jezreel Valley. And then it cut across the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee and went on to Damascus. So don't miss this, Capernaum straddled the International Highway that ran all the way from Egypt to Damascus, to really beyond that to Mesopotamia. So, it was an ideal base then, for Jesus' ministry. Travelers passing through the city of Capernaum would carry word of His teaching and His miracles all across the ancient world. It's Capernaum.

In Hebrew, it's '*Kafar Nahum*.' It means 'the village of Nahum.' Now if it's named after a man, we don't know which Nahum it is. Could be the prophet in the Old Testament, could be someone else. But the Hebrew word '*Nahum*' means 'compassion.' So, it could simply be 'the city or village of compassion.' But regardless, this is where Jesus settled. The city spread along the shore of the northwest corner of the Lake for about a quarter of a mile, but it didn't extend very far inland. There was an ancient harbor there that extended along a twenty-five-hundred-foot promenade with an eight-foot wide seawall. Josephus tells us that there were piers that

extended out into the lake about one-hundred feet. It was a beautiful town in the ancient world. Estimates of the population vary, but it could easily have been as high as twelve to fifteen-thousand; that's what many say. The city had a number of opposing groups like the Zealots and the Pharisees. So, Rome had stationed a garrison of Roman soldiers there to keep the peace. But it was primarily a fishing town. Obviously, right there on the lake, they would go on the lake, fish, bring the fish to Capernaum. There they would salt them, and then they would export them across the inland of Israel. Fish was an important part of the diet there and still is. In fact, if you go to Israel today, you have fish for breakfast.

There were also farmers. This area of Galilee is one of the most fertile areas in all of Israel—beautiful land, beautiful farms. There were artisans that made millstones, and olive presses out of the black basalt rock that's found there. There were also a variety of merchants. Because of that, the city also housed an important customs station. It was on the border between two territories, that of Herod Antipas and Philip the Tetrarch. And so, there was this customs station to ~~to~~ collect customs as people went in from one region to another. That's where Matthew worked. Matthew, who wrote our Gospel, lived in Capernaum, and he worked at that tax house there in Capernaum. It was a city with great commercial advantages and economic prosperity.

It also had a religious heritage. In the fourth century after Christ, the city built a synagogue that, frankly, is one of the most impressive ancient synagogues you'll find in the whole land of Israel. But the fourth-century synagogue was actually built on the foundation of an earlier synagogue, undoubtedly the synagogue in which Jesus often preached when this was His home. He preached in that synagogue many times, including His famous sermon recorded in John, chapter 6. Five of His Apostles were from Capernaum; they were living there at the time. They were from, in a couple of cases, other cities, but they lived in Capernaum. Peter and Andrew, along

with their fishing partners, James and John, and Matthew was from Capernaum as well. And so, this was a central city. More of Christ's recorded miracles occurred in Capernaum than in any other city. Jesus adopted the city. In fact, Matthew, who, it was his hometown, Matthew calls this city in chapter 9, verse 1, Jesus' "own city." So, think about it, instead of the large, impressive, strategic city of Jerusalem with its Temple, Jesus makes the perplexing choice to focus a great deal of His earthly ministry in this place.

But it's not nearly so puzzling when you consider, thirdly, "The Prophetic Implications." Matthew helps us understand why Jesus would make this choice in verses 14 to 16. Jesus' decision to settle in Galilee and to establish His ministry home in Capernaum actually grows out of the details of an ancient prophecy by Isaiah. And Isaiah's prophecy explains to us the ultimate spiritual implications behind Jesus' surprising choice. Let's look at those implications. Here's why. Here are the spiritual implications. Number one, it authenticates, this choice "Authenticates Jesus' Messianic credentials." Verse 14, Matthew writes, here's why Jesus settled in this place; "*This* was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet."

Now, then He launches into one of His longest Old Testament quotes. The quote itself comes from Isaiah, chapter 9, verses 1 and 2. We'll turn back there in a moment; but it was seven-hundred years before Christ that Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would minister in this most unexpected place; that He would minister in an area in Israel that was actually filled with Gentiles. That it was a region often scarred by war. Because it was on the northern border of Israel, and most of Israel's enemies came from the north, that was the first place the invading armies came to, and it was ravaged often through the years. In fact, in Isaiah, in the context of this prophecy, Isaiah prophesied that this region would be ravaged by the armies of the ancient nation of Assyria, which is exactly what happened. But he also says that eventually, it's in that

troubled part of the land of Israel where the Messiah would come, and He would establish His ministry there.

Now Matthew wants us to know and understand that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled exactly. Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, seven-hundred years after the prophecy was made, does exactly that—He establishes His ministry in this unexpected, perplexing place, and in so doing, He fulfilled yet another prophecy about the Messiah. You see, this prophecy along with all of the others that Matthew has already recorded and will record, the many others that we'll see as we move through this book, they all work together to confirm the credentials of Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Hebrew Messiah. If you have any doubts in your mind about Jesus of Nazareth and who He is and His claims, listen, God couldn't have given you more proof. We're working our way through Matthew's Gospel and there is prophecy after prophecy. Here's one, made seven-hundred years before Jesus came to this planet, and He fulfilled it perfectly and that's just one of many! You don't need any more evidence; God's given you all the evidence you need. It authenticates His messianic credentials.

But the prophecy of Isaiah and its fulfillment, Jesus' choice of this place, also “Anticipates Jesus' worldwide mission,” it anticipates Jesus' worldwide mission. Look at verse 15, “THE LAND OF ZEBULUN,” this is the quote from Isaiah, “THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES.” This is Matthew's translation, it appears, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit from the Hebrew. It's not exactly like the Hebrew; it's not the Septuagint. So apparently, Matthew, under the inspiration and probably teaching of the Lord Himself, translates it this way.

And notice how he describes this region. He does so in four ways. First of all, he says, “IT’S THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI.” It was the portion of Israel that God had allotted to these two tribes during the time of Joshua. If you read the story, you learn that soon after these tribes arrived in this area, now called Galilee, they absolutely failed. They failed to expel the Canaanites and soon there was intermarriage; it became a mixed population, so it was interspersed with Gentiles from the very beginning. He also describes it in verse 15 as, “BY THE WAY OF THE SEA.” That likely refers to that international highway, we saw a few minutes ago, that runs through Galilee and eventually runs down by the Mediterranean. It’s “the way of the sea.” In fact, the Romans eventually called this very road ‘Via Maris,’ “by the way of the sea.” Thirdly, he describes it as “BEYOND THE JORDAN.” Now Isaiah is here, in context, probably speaking from the perspective of the Assyrian invaders. They came from the east, so as they’re coming to the land, what’s beyond the Jordan? It’s west of the Jordan, the western side of the Jordan. And then finally, he describes it as “GALILEE OF THE GENTILES,” or we could say “Galilee of the nations.” That is a most fascinating description. The name ‘Galilee’ actually comes from the Hebrew word ‘*Galil*’ and that word means ‘the circle’ or ‘the circuit.’ So, it’s “the circle” or “the circuit of the Gentiles,” likely referring to the circle of twenty cities that Solomon gave to Hiram, King of Tyre, in 1 Kings 9. So, this area then came to be populated, this circle of cities, came to be populated by many Gentiles and it eventually, that name, included the entire region. So, many Gentiles.

In fact, we learn in the year 164 B.C. that there were so few Jews in Galilee that when the Maccabees, in that period of time in Israel’s history, were bothered and concerned about enemy attacks, they actually exported all of the Jews from Galilee into Judea. There were so few they could do that; they could move them all to Judea. It was a place of land, a plot of land; Galilee

was, only about fifty miles long and twenty-five miles wide, but Josephus estimates that there were some three-million people who lived in Galilee in the first century. There were two-hundred-four cities, and a number of those cities had more than fifteen-thousand people in each, probably including the city of Capernaum. But what made this area unique, or “Galilee of the nations,” “Galilee of the Gentiles,” was that it consisted not only of Jews, but also of many other nationalities. It makes sense when you think about it. I mean even today, look at the map, then as now, that land was surrounded by Gentile nations. On the south, you had Samaria with its mixed population. On the west, you had Phoenicia, modern Lebanon. On the east and to the north, you had Syria. In addition, when Assyria, the ancient nation seven-hundred years before Christ, captured the Northern Kingdom, including Galilee, in the year 722 B.C., they carried most of the Jews off, back to Assyria, and then they resettled the area with immigrants who were Gentiles, both Assyrians and other Gentiles. So, from that time, seven-hundred years before Christ, Galilee always had both Jews and Gentiles. In fact, in Jesus' time, there were entire cities that were Gentile. For example, the city of Tiberias, and the city of Beit Shean.

Now, why does this matter? What's the point? Folks, it is no accident that this Gospel, written to Jewish believers, Matthew begins this Gospel with Gentile wise men announcing the birth of Jesus. Then, here in chapter 4, he shares with us that Jesus lives in “Galilee of the Gentiles,” Galilee of the nations. And he ends his Gospel by reminding us of Jesus' command to take the Gospel to all the nations. You see, this was “Jesus' worldwide mission.” And even in His choice of where He would minister, you see this anticipated. That's why Simeon, in Luke, chapter 2, verse 32, when he took the baby Jesus in his arms at the temple, he said about Jesus, He is “A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, and the glory of your people Israel.” Even Jesus'

choice of His ministry home underscores that Jesus truly is the Savior of the world. He's the Light of the world.

His choice also, thirdly, brings another implication, and that is His choice “Illustrates Jesus' saving purpose,” it illustrates Jesus' saving purpose. Look at verse 16, “THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT.” It's really a profound picture that is presented here by Isaiah and repeated by Matthew. The picture is of those who were walking around, but they lost their way, and then night settles in, and they find themselves at night, completely lost. They can't see where to go, and so they find themselves completely hopeless. They simply just sit down where they are thinking, “We have no idea which direction to set off,” hopelessness, those habitually in the darkness. But notice verse 16 says, they came to see, “A GREAT (In Greek, mega, a mega.) LIGHT.” This is no ordinary Light; this is a Mega Light. He goes on in verse 16, “AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED.” That expression, “sitting in the land and shadow of death,” that's a Hebrew figure of speech for ‘the darkest darkness.’

What is the darkest place, physically, you have ever been on this planet, when you really struggle to see? Well, let me ask you differently. “What is the darkest place on this planet?” They tell us that it's caves, or the bottom of the ocean, but on land, caves. For example, the Krubera Cave, it's in the country of Georgia in Europe. It's over 7,200 feet deep, 1.36 miles deep, and those who climb caves have descended to its depths. When you reach the bottom of the Krubera Cave, the level of darkness is absolute—literally zero lumens—no measurable light! Your eyes actually never adjust to that level of darkness because there is no ambient light for the rods and cones in your eyes to even receive. So, you can hold your hand in front of your face, after hours, sitting in that cave, you will never see your hand. That's what the people in Galilee

were like, spiritually. They were sitting hopelessly in the dark. They couldn't see where to go. They were locked in the darkness of spiritual blindness, of moral depravity, of spiritual hopelessness. But into the total darkness of their souls and lives, the sun dawned. That's the picture here.

What, or better, who is the Light? Now turn back to Isaiah. Turn back to Isaiah, chapter 9, you'll notice in verse 2 we have the quote that we've been looking at in Matthew. Isaiah 9:2, "The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them." Who is the Light? Look at verse 6, "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." There's the Light, the Light has a name, He's the Messiah, He's Jesus of Nazareth. Turn over to Isaiah, chapter 42. This is another of the passages in Isaiah that are one of the Servant Songs, as they are called, the songs about the Messiah. And look how God speaks to the Messiah in Isaiah 42, verse 6:

I am the LORD (Yahweh) (And now He's speaking to the Messiah; He's speaking to Jesus.), I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, and I will appoint You as a covenant to the people (to the people Israel), as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison.

Friends, what I want you to see is every one of us, apart from Christ, is just like the people of Galilee. We were sitting hopelessly in the deepest dark where we couldn't spiritually see our hand. We had no idea what to do about ourselves and our sin and our guilt. And then the Light dawned, the Sun came up! That's the Lord Jesus Christ. Our lives that were once filled with the

darkness of spiritual ignorance, of sin, of guilt, and misery, into our darkness the sunlight dawned. The Son came up. Not S-U-N, but S-O-N!

Now, verse 16 has a couple of interesting implications that really encourage us to believe the Gospel. I mean, think about this, since the Light of the Messiah shines in the greatest darkness, what does that tell us about how someone's rescued from their darkness? It has to be solely by God's grace because people in darkness can't generate light. Sitting in the bottom of the Krubera Cave, you can't generate light. That light has to be outside of you, and that's exactly how God brings light into our dark souls. It's by His grace alone where He enters into our darkness and causes the Son to rise. We hear the Gospel; we respond to that Gospel.

But also, the fact that Jesus shines in the darkest place shows us something that should be very encouraging to you, and that is, "There is no sinner beyond the reach of the grace of Jesus Christ." You say, "Tom, I don't know how God could ever forgive me; you don't know what I've done. You don't know what I've become." And my response to you is the Son dispels darkness regardless of how dark that darkness is. If you will repent of your sins, and you'll put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, His Light will shine on you, and you'll no longer be in the darkness. But in His Light, He is the light of the world. He said, "He who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." That's my invitation to you today.

How should we apply this passage to ourselves? Let me give you three major implications. Number one, "If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, Jesus' decision here demands that you develop a heart to proclaim the Gospel, not only to your own people, but also to the nations," just like His own heart. Let me ask you, "Christian, do you ever stop looking at your spiritual navel and start looking at the world and saying, 'Christ has a mission. He loves the world. I need

to get outside of myself, and I need to start praying for the people in my life to come to know Christ. I need to start sharing the Gospel. I need to develop a heart for the world.” How about starting by praying for our missionaries? When's the last time you prayed for our missionaries? Listen, own Jesus' heart for the world.

Number two, “If you're not a disciple of Jesus, the evidence in this passage alone demands that you believe Jesus is who He claimed to be, and that you respond to His saving message.” Listen, we're going to see lots of evidence in Matthew's Gospel, and that doesn't exhaust the evidence in the Old Testament and the rest of the New Testament, but just this text is enough. It's God's invitation to you, friend, to repent of your sins and to come out of your darkness into the Light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Number three, “Those with the greatest exposure to the Light, but who indifferently reject God's Son as Savior and Lord, will receive the greatest punishment at the judgment.” This is a lesson we learn about the city of Capernaum, where Jesus made His ministry headquarters. Look at what He said. Turn over to Matthew, chapter 11; Matthew, chapter 11, and look at verse 23, along with the other cities, Jesus says this:

“And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom, which had occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in *the* day of judgment than for you.”

John MacArthur perceptively comments on this; he says, “There's no record that the people of Capernaum ever mocked or ridiculed Jesus, ran Him out of town, threatened His life. Yet the sin of that city, indifference to Christ, was worse than Sodom's gross wickedness.” Friend, you

realize that the greatest judgment that God will mete out will not be for terrorists and murderers; it will be for good people who were exposed to the Light and who indifferently passed by, rejected it. It worries me for people, kids growing up in this church, who just indifferently reject Jesus. Listen, you have had more Light than you deserve to have, and God will hold you accountable for that Light. My prayer for you is that even today, you will repent and believe in the Son of God as Savior and Lord.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for this passage. Thank You for what we've learned here. Lord, help us as believers, like Jesus, to develop a heart for His worldwide mission. Help us to get outside of ourselves, outside of our selfishness, and to pray for the people around us, to pray for our missionaries, to give, to invest in eternity.

And Father, for those who are here who don't know You through Your Son; Lord, they've had sufficient evidence, they've had sufficient Light, may they turn to Him who is the Light of the world even today, we pray for His name and for His sake, Amen.