

The gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus is the fulfilment of the prophecy in Isaiah 9, “the people walking in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”

In Isaiah, the darkness that Jesus dispels is the darkness of *oppression*, brought on by *sin*. What God’s people were experiencing was like being under the thumb of Midian back in Gideon’s day, when Israel’s sin and idolatry had caused God to judge them by allowing Midian to conquer them and rule over them. Not only did Midian conquer Israel, but whenever God’s people tried to plant and harvest, Midian would swoop back in like locusts and take everything away. That’s what we’re reminded of in Isaiah 9:3 – when the light shines, God’s people are finally able to enjoy their harvests again, since the one who brings light has ended their oppression by breaking the oppressors rod as on the day of Midian (Isa. 9:4).

Sin and idolatry had plunged God’s people into the darkness of being conquered, plundered, and oppressed. But when Jesus moves to Capernaum in Galilee, the light dawns on that region in fulfillment of Isaiah’s words. And in the very next verse, v.17, Matthew says: “From that time on, Jesus began to preach, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Matthew wants us to connect Jesus’ preaching with the dawning of the light. This is how the light dawns – when the good news is preached.

And the good news that is preached is the arrival of God’s kingdom. What people in darkness need to hear is that the kingdom of heaven has come to earth. They have been oppressed and beaten down under the thumb of a rival kingdom, but now a deliverer has been raised up, a new Gideon to break the oppressor’s rod.

And that good news demands a particular response: since this heavenly kingdom is coming, what do you need to do? Repent! Since sin had brought on the oppression, repentance must accompany the end of oppression. Sin was what had caused Israel to be conquered and oppressed, and so repentance is what will bring them out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light.

When Gideon heard God’s call to deliver Israel, he rallied his brothers and sent out messengers to rally Israel back to the Lord, and we see Jesus doing the same thing as He calls Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow him and call Israel back to God.

For Gideon, the strategy was to suddenly shine light into the darkness of Midian’s camp and then engage in warfare. In Jesus’ day, the enemy is like Midian in that sin has led to oppression, but it is different in that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” And so in Matthew 4:23, we see Jesus’ strategy in three steps: Jesus brings light to Galilee and breaks the rod of the oppressor by *teaching*, *proclaiming*, and *healing*.

Teaching is what Jesus does within the synagogue on the Sabbath, to committed and faithful Jews. This is a formal teaching, much like what I'm doing right now. The clearest example we have of Jesus doing this comes before he leaves Nazareth for Galilee, in Luke 3. He stands up to read, they give Him the Isaiah scroll, He finds the place where Isaiah writes: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he sits down and starts to explain what this text is about: "Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Now, they aren't too keen on His teaching in Nazareth, and they don't want His proclamations or healings, but when He goes to Galilee and teaches on the Sabbath, the people are "astonished at His teaching, for His word possessed authority." Through His ministry of teaching, He explains that He is the one bringing in the kingdom by proclaiming and healing.

His proclaiming ministry is an extension of His teaching ministry, but His proclamation is out in public, it isn't a formal synagogue service, and as He proclaims the good news, He isn't primarily explaining passages from the OT, He is *announcing the coming of the kingdom*. The big idea is that there is a difference between explaining the Bible in church and proclaiming the gospel in the world. There is overlap, certainly, but there is a real difference, too. Proclaiming focuses much more on announcement; teaching is more focused on explanation. Proclamation is brief, punchy, evangelistic. Teaching takes longer, goes deeper, and the goal is edification more than evangelism. They are different things, but both of them were essential parts of Jesus' ministry, and when Jesus gives gifts to His church in Ephesians 4, He makes sure to give both teachers and evangelists to continue His mission.

Next, Jesus heals every disease and every affliction among the people. Not only does He teach and proclaim with authority, but His message is confirmed by His miracles. Can a man open blind eyes, cure lepers, make the lame walk, and raise the dead to life unless God is with Him?

But His works of healing do more than simply back up His teaching. They actually start to *transform* the world into the heavenly kingdom that Jesus announces. In the kingdom that we long for, there is no sickness, hunger, thirst, poverty, abuse, and death, and so Jesus gets to work against sickness, hunger, death, and all the rest. He's not just doing magic tricks to capture your attention so that you'll listen to Him; He's showing you what God's kingdom looks like by bringing it to earth as it is in heaven. Jesus doesn't just *announce* the kingdom; He *brings* the kingdom.

And as you look at Jesus' ministry, you might start to notice what I'm calling the Epiphany paradox: what Jesus says and does reveals Him to be utterly *unique*, one-of-a-kind, chosen and sent by God to do something that no one else could ever do. God had raised up many deliverers like Gideon throughout Israel's history, but Jesus is different. Jesus is greater. Jesus is not just a man empowered by God for a temporary physical deliverance. Jesus is God in the flesh, sent to accomplish an eternal, once-for-all, deliverance of body and soul.

Because of this, the first response we should have to Jesus is not imitation, but awe. We cannot do what Jesus did, and we are not supposed to. We are not called to save the world through our death and resurrection; we should bow down and worship Jesus, the one who died and rose as the Savior of the world. The Church is not the Savior. Jesus is the Savior.

And so we don't offer *the church's teaching* to the world. We teach the Word of Jesus, because no one ever spoke like that man. We proclaim *not ourselves*, but *Christ crucified*. We don't heal or minister to the sick and afflicted *in our own name*, but *in the name of Jesus*. As Christians, before we are anything else, we are *worshippers*, giving glory and praise to Jesus

But the paradox of Epiphany is that *because* Jesus did for us what we could never do for ourselves, He *enables* us to do what we could never do before. We couldn't save ourselves, but now Jesus makes us agents of salvation. Now that we've been saved, we're called to live like Jesus.

Without Jesus, we have nothing to teach, nothing to proclaim, no ability to help and heal. But because Jesus has brought us light, what *was* impossible for us is not only *possible*, it's now our mission. This is the Epiphany paradox: **Epiphany shows us that there is no one like Jesus, and Epiphany calls us all to be like Jesus.** The only way for this to make sense is if Jesus does for us what we couldn't do for ourselves; only if Jesus makes us new; only if Jesus transforms us.

And the image that Isaiah and Matthew give us is very simple, but it explains so much: before Jesus, we're all walking in darkness. After Jesus, the lights are on! There are so many things you *can't* do in the dark that you *are* able to do in the light! Only Jesus could bring light to the world, because only Jesus *is* the light of the world. But once you have been "enlightened", once you've been filled with His light, you, too, can be light! Of course it's never your own light; of course we can't ever think of ourselves as the source of the light. But we *can* bear the light of Christ, and in fact, the people of God *must* be the light of Christ to the world, which is what Jesus Himself said: "You are the light of the world."

Epiphany says: "Jesus is the light of the world." Jesus says "You are the light of the world."

Since Jesus says this, we can and must apply verse 23 to the Church. For us to be the light of the world, our mission is to teach, proclaim, and heal. And so those are our three points of application: Teach! Proclaim! Heal! And your task is to press those applications even deeper into your own life: what's my role in teaching? What's my part in proclaiming? How can I help and heal this sin-sick world?

Some people (like me) within the church are specifically called to teaching by opening up the Word of God and explaining it like Jesus did in the synagogue in Luke 3, and it's obvious how I teach. But how do you teach? You teach when you support a Church where the Word of God is taught. You are teaching through me. But you are also teaching in your own homes, when you open the Word of God in family worship, in personal devotions, in instructing your children in what God's Word says.

The Church proclaims the gospel primarily through her evangelists – those called to a more public ministry of sharing the good news outside of the walls of the Church – rallies, street preaching, television and internet ministries devoted to announcing that the kingdom is here, and Jesus is the king. You share in that work by supporting such ministries, and so our Church proclaims the gospel through Steve Kaiss and Youth for Christ, and Blake Purcell and the Slavic Reformation Society.

But we also proclaim the gospel as individuals, as well, when in simple conversation we explain our lives in terms of Christ's Lordship, and announce that Jesus is King. Why don't we sleep in on Sundays, why do we give our kids a different education than the world, why do we discipline our sex lives the way we do, why do we oppose the murder of unborn babies, and so on. When we give the answer that Jesus is king, then we are proclaiming the gospel and announcing the kingdom of God. This is how we follow Jesus, and this is how we become fishers of men.

And finally, we heal the world by working against sickness, affliction, disease, and death. We do this through Spirit-filled prayer that asks God for miraculous healing, and we do this through our everyday efforts in medicine, technology, science, education, and so on. We seek to do this in specifically Christian ways by offering mercy to those who are suffering and afflicted in Jesus' name: that's why we participate in Winter Relief and Feed Annapolis, that's why we speak out against abortion and go march in Washington every year, that's why we visit the sick and take them meals, that's why we conduct funerals and weep with those who weep, that's why we open our homes to orphans and widows, that's why we adopt children and pursue foster care. We are shining Christ's light to people walking in darkness, and we are rolling back that darkness in order to give this world a taste of the coming kingdom.

Here is what God says to you today: Jesus is the light of the world. Hear His preaching, and repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Listen to His teaching. Receive His gospel by faith. Come to Jesus and be healed! When you do this, your darkness turns to light, so that you then can *be* the light of world in Jesus' name: teach the Word of God. Proclaim the gospel of the kingdom. Heal every disease and every affliction,

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

Let us pray: "Gracious God, when we were walking in darkness, you sent Jesus to light our way through His ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing, and for this great light, we give you thanks. As you continue to shine that light through your Word, we ask that you would teach us your ways, and empower us to proclaim the good news of the kingdom and bring healing to this groaning world in Jesus' name. Amen!"