

**Title:** Bringing Light Into Darkness

**Subtitle:** Facing life's troubles with confidence

Video URL: [https://youtu.be/SL\\_sQIHPo](https://youtu.be/SL_sQIHPo)

The Gospel today takes place in a setting that is filled with gloom, anguish, and darkness. Its location and scenario are foretold in our reading from Isaiah, yet with all that tempts people to give up hope, the light still shines.

It was a dark day in Israel's history when John the Baptist was arrested and imprisoned. John was "*a burning and a shining light, and people were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.*"<sup>1</sup> When his light was taken from them, "*Jesus withdrew to Galilee.*"<sup>2</sup> When bad things happen, there is often a need to pull back and regroup. The word "withdrew" in Matthew's Gospel is usually used for those taking refuge from danger. Jesus was not immune from life's hazards and heartaches; he was "*a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*"<sup>3</sup> When John was imprisoned, it affected Jesus so profoundly that even he needed time to regain his bearings. And as he does so, he embarks on a whole arena of ministry.

Who would have thought that this Prince of Israel would withdraw to a place called "*Galilee of the Gentiles,*"<sup>4</sup> an area known in Israel's history as "*the land of the shadow of death.*"<sup>5</sup> Isaiah described it as such due to God's judgments that would lay the region waste by heathen oppressors. The people living there "sat in darkness" and needed the light of life. Then, after almost 800 years, God utilized everything, even John's

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<sup>1</sup> John 5:35

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 4:12b

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 53:3

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 4:15

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 4:16

imprisonment, to bring about a greater good. After John's light was eclipsed, the full light of Christ came forth.

The struggle that goes on between light and darkness has existed since the fall of Adam and Eve. It is a part of the human condition that disorients us. In Biblical history, darkness is one of the ways that the prophets described spiritual ignorance that brings bewilderment, confusion, and despair. Sometimes it is so thick it can be felt. When Jesus encountered it, even he had to pull back before going forward. Herbert O'Driscoll once wrote, "Sometimes withdrawing enables us to see what should be done, to make plans, to gather energy, to achieve much more."<sup>6</sup>

There was a time in my own ministry when I similarly needed to withdraw for a season. I was burned out and discouraged. During this time, I withdrew from full-time ministry and became an electrical contractor. My ministry didn't end; it simply took a different direction. I was able to preach at various churches almost every weekend, and as a result, hospice chaplaincy became available. This, as I look back, was the sweet spot in ministry, and as it turned out, it was one of the most fruitful times of my life.

When Jesus engaged the world, he encountered darkness at every turn. And as he did so, he did not face that darkness alone. His kingdom ministry involved others who would become "fishers of people." O'Driscoll calls this the "initiating moment" of the Christian community. He says it is like watching the reproductive process of cells under a microscope. The "original cell" pulsating with life is Jesus. But then, there were two more. And then four. On and on, over the last two millennia, the process of multiplication has ensued from this original call: "Follow me."

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<sup>6</sup> Herbert O'Driscoll, "Child of Peace, Lord of Life," 1985

This call to “*become fishers of people*” means that following Christ is not just for personal fulfillment. We are called for others. It calls for change in the way we think about life, which is fundamentally the meaning behind the word “repent.”<sup>7</sup> The preaching of God’s kingdom always runs counter to the darkness of our world with his fallen precepts about life and human nature.

Here are just a few examples of what I mean:

**The World Would Say:**

Seeing is believing

Jesus said, “*Blessed are those who have not seen yet believe.*”<sup>8</sup>

Save your life

Take the front seat, exalt yourself

Love is a feeling that grows cold

Retaliate

Look to your own interests

**The Kingdom of God:**

Believing is seeing

Lose your life<sup>9</sup>

Take the back seat, and humble yourself<sup>10</sup>

Love is a commitment<sup>11</sup>

Forgive as you have been forgiven<sup>12</sup>

Look to the welfare of others<sup>13</sup>

These contrasts are just a few of the many ways the world and the Kingdom of God differ, and they are an illustration of our need to have our minds transformed. When our lives are reoriented to the kingdom of God, we become followers of Christ and fishers of men and women. This is not a passive endeavor. We are called to make a difference.

When Jesus proclaimed, “*The kingdom of heaven is near,*” he expressed its extreme closeness and immediate

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<sup>7</sup> Strong’s Concordance, # 3340 metanoeó (met-an-o-eh'-o):to change one's mind or purpose

<sup>8</sup> John 20:29

<sup>9</sup> See Matthew 16:25

<sup>10</sup> See Luke 14:11

<sup>11</sup> See John 13:34

<sup>12</sup> See Col. 3:13

<sup>13</sup> See Phil. 2:4

imminence.<sup>14</sup> It is so close that it is within our grasp. It is not merely a distant dream. It is a present possibility, a present reality. This declaration was the starting point for all of Jesus' teaching. Everything that comes after it grows out of the idea that God's Kingdom is coming and has come to change our whole perspective on life. It is a way of envisioning a world where God's rule begins to take place. And as long as he is in the picture of our lives, then no matter what we are going through, we have hope.

The kingdom of heaven is at hand in this world. It remains a real possibility wherever there are followers of Jesus willing to live out what they believe. And as they encounter the kingdoms of darkness, things can and will begin to change.

There is something extraordinary about our Lord's dream. It is a dream of the rule of God in every heart. And Christ is still looking for co-workers—men and women who will be fishers of men and women- seeking to introduce their friends and neighbors to this kingdom of love. Jesus said, ***“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.”***<sup>15</sup> So ***“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”***<sup>16</sup> When we participate with him, heaven comes down to earth, bringing light that dispels the darkness. There is no greater joy than to share that light with others. Amen.

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<sup>14</sup> Strong's Concordance, # 1448, eggizó (eng-id'-zo): to make near, to come near (indicative mood) expressing “extreme closeness”

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 5:14

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 5:16