

**Matthew 4:12-23. Jan.26<sup>th</sup>, 2014.**

### **Kids' lesson shared at time of Gospel Reading**

- Object: Paper dolls that look different from one another.
- Note: Keep them hidden for the moment.

I want you to listen carefully to the description I give right now. I'm going to ask you to use the information in a moment. I'm thinking of a paper doll. It has... (describe the unique characteristics of one of the dolls)

- Then, unveil, and ask...

Tell me which one of the dolls was I talking about?

You were able to identify the doll correctly because of my description, given beforehand.

In a similar way, the people of Jesus' time could identify him as the promised Savior. How? God had given them a description ahead of time. God's Old Testament prophets described many things about the Savior: that he would make blind eyes see, paralyzed people walk, deaf ears able to hear, mute tongues able to speak; and that the good news of God would be preached.

Did you hear what the end of our Bible Lesson from Matthew just said about Jesus?

*Read 4:23. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.*

The miracles Jesus did help us identify: He is the Savior God promised – He is God the Son who came to save us.

Now, I want you to listen with your families, at the time of the sermon. We're going to spend that time talking about Jesus' preaching & teaching. Let's thank God now for what he has taught us in His Word:

We praise you, Jesus, for you have taken away our sins. We thank you, Holy Spirit, for bringing us to know Jesus and trust in him. Dear Father in Heaven, now that you have made us your dear children, keep us in your grace and truth. Amen.

**Sermon – Matthew 4** <sup>12</sup> *When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. <sup>13</sup> Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— <sup>14</sup> to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: <sup>15</sup> “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— <sup>16</sup> 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.” <sup>17</sup> From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” ... <sup>23</sup> Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.*

Who am I? Why am I here? Do I matter? Or is my life just an aimless existence?

These questions have haunted humanity through the ages. It has driven some to do anything to prove they matter. Listen to this quote from Madonna from the high point of her career in 1991:

“All of my will has always been to conquer some horrible feeling of inadequacy. I’m always struggling with that fear. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being and then I get to another stage and think I’m mediocre and uninteresting. ... My drive in life is from this horrible fear of being mediocre. And that’s always pushing me, pushing me. Because even though I’ve become somebody, I still have to prove that I am somebody. My struggle has never ended and it probably never will.”  
Vanity Fair

For those among us whose point of reference for entertainment & news is a little later than 1991: Do you think that some of the teen & 20-something singers of today embody the same struggle?

Others, in search for meaning, will spend their lives amassing fortunes and founding charities. Still others will give themselves to a cause, and spend every ounce of themselves - offering hands-on help to those less fortunate. Mother Teresa did just that. Yet, her letters reveal haunting questions & uncertainty. "What do I labor for?" she asked in one letter. According to her letters, she died in turmoil – doubts, questions & fears [<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/letters-reveal-mother-teresas-secret/>].

I listened to a portion of a presentation recently that dealt with this topic [[www.breadforbeggars.com](http://www.breadforbeggars.com) – presenter: Pastor Hein – Nothing New Under the Sun]. Alfred Adler, a prominent Psychologist who lived in the late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, was cited. He said, in summary:

Everybody in the world is trying to find peace by building their identity on something. Everybody is building their identity on something, and we have to in order to find peace in life.

Voices call from every direction, recommending whom you ought to consult if you want to find the meaning of your life, and thereby, peace. (1) Approximately 1 in 4 Americans consult the horoscope, to tell about their life & future [2005 Gallup Poll]. (2) Big name celebrities, like Harrison Ford and Richard Gere, tell you to consult the Dalai Lama if you want peace. I just heard a promo on the radio where Jerry Seinfeld is raving about this TM guy – a Transcendental Meditation guru to many stars.

Others have shrugged their shoulders, saying: “TMI (too much information) ~ who are we to know?” And they go out to live their lives under the philosophy, “Eat, drink, and be merry.”

The prophet Isaiah, in words we heard earlier, sums up our world very well. Listen...

*If they do not speak according to this word [namely, the Lord’s Word], they have no light of dawn. <sup>21</sup> Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. <sup>22</sup> Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.... <sup>2</sup> The people walking in darkness... [8:20-9:2]*

Isaiah’s description is graphic. Our God through the prophet Isaiah has taken us inside human hearts with the description “living in darkness.” People spending themselves in a pursuit to find meaning, purpose, and peace. Frustrated because after all their effort – although they may have found worldly pleasure along the way – they were empty in the end. Unsatisfied. In fearful gloom. That’s the reality of “living in darkness.”

In many cases, people are blind to the darkness in which they live. Just think of the creature Gollum [of *The Hobbit*] hunched down in the darkness, adoring his precious. He is so consumed with his obsession;

he doesn't even notice the dark. In fact, he grows to love the dark and hate the light. In the end, he is empty when his precious is gone. Angry, too! He will do anything to get back his precious. Gollum is fictional. But his story line is repeated in reality: how many people go about life blind to the darkness in which they live? And, if something happens in life to disturb their "darkened peace," they end up empty and/or – watch out! – angry.

Though people will try all sorts of avenues and search all over for meaning and purpose, only one source exists. There is a famous quote that reflects this: "Our hearts are restless, until they find rest in you, LORD" [Saint Augustine].

Right here – the Bible – we have the way out of the darkness. Here is the light!

So everyone is going to be overjoyed when they hear the truth!?

No. Just look at what happened to John the Baptizer. He was in prison. His crime? He had simply shared the truth; he had called sin by its right name: sin. But he did it to a person in a very powerful place: Herod Antipas. Herod didn't take too kindly to hearing the truth. So John got thrown behind bars, and later was beheaded.

Into this scene stepped Jesus. In our section of Matthew ch.4 today, he is busy setting up his home-base in Capernaum, a hub for his ministry. Capernaum was on a major trade route of traveling salesmen - a crossroads of cultures. And although from a secular standpoint you might describe it as a thriving place, Matthew – quoting Isaiah – paints for us the darkness of the scene. Into that darkness...

Jesus preached. He taught God's truth. There are two points to the truth, as we see in our Bible section today: 1. "Repent"; & 2. "The good news of the kingdom. "

Those are the two central teachings of all God's Word, capsulized in a handful of words. "Repentance" is: a change of heart, worked by the Holy Spirit. Admitting our dark, lost condition. Coming clean about the specific sins we've each committed. Understanding I can't *earn* God's favor back: there is *no way* for me to right my relationship with God.

And that's important to understand, because our natural human tendency is to conclude: "I have to make up for what I did wrong. . . I must work my way into God's good favor."

God's truth is totally "foreign" to our natural way of thinking. Jesus preached: "the good news of the kingdom." Listen to some words from Colossians that lay out in greater detail what is meant by that.

"The Father has qualified you to share in *the inheritance* of the saints in the kingdom of light." Those of you in Bible Class have heard me say this: Who does all the work for the inheritance? (Pause for answer). Yes! We get the benefit of Jesus' work through faith in Jesus, as our Savior. Colossians 1 continues: "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" – Colossians 1:12-14. Trust in Him!

Jesus spoke this pointed, powerful truth into the dark nooks where opposition gathered and into shadowed crannies where despair held sway. He backed up his words with action: He let the darkness of hell itself devour him. But Jesus, the Light, burst forth in victory from the grave! And the Truth shines like a beacon to the world. The evidence of it is gathered in this room:

He called you and me out of darkness into his wonderful light. You & I have received mercy. So declare His praise! - 1 Peter 2:9-11

Realize that this very good sounding news is going to sound very much like an attack to most people in our society, ones who are content with the meaning and purpose they have carved out in their lives – or, ones who simply care about their “precious!” You stand out like a like a pimple on the nose of humanity, if you stand for this Biblical teaching: those without God’s truth are in spiritual darkness, and on a path that only ends in pain & sadness & total loss. And people may respond about as kindly as they do to a pimple.

Who wants to be looked at and treated like that?! And so, a challenge rises:

- 1) our sinful self tries to clap a hand over our mouth, to keep us from talking about this spiritual truth beyond the walls of this church building. Do I hesitate to speak because I fear the reaction I’ll get? Well, that’s my sinful self. After all, aren’t we tempted to want only physical comfort, ease and acceptance all the time.
- 2) Add to that the fact: our sinful self is absolutely horrified when we openly confess how spiritually blind we, ourselves, were at one time. Do you feel uncomfortable with this? Be alert for attacks. The world and many churches propose: there’s some good in each one of us by nature. The sinful self can grab that claim – and any like it – and attempt to throw it like a blanket over this truth of God.
- 3) And then, there is this ... The sinful self wants all our time to be spent on self. It works endlessly to stir reluctance, or refusal, to invest time to identify, answer and reject the sin-darkened ideas of our world. To do that requires daily time in the Word: preparing for attacks, & returning to the Word to counter attacks as they surface. And my sinful self, again, wants only the easy life.

And so... we face a challenge too great and an enemy too strong for us. Where does that leave us? Better put, where does that lead us?

Right back to our Lord, and his message. “Lord, we admit the many times & many ways we’ve joined in the thinking of the world around us. We’ve sought happiness on paths that have gone our own way, apart from your will. We rejoice that you have washed us clean in the blood of our Savior.”

To the Word! To the Word for assurance and for new strength... He broke us out of darkness and the deepest gloom. . .

- 2 Corinthians 4 – “God made his light shine in our hearts, to give us the light: the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ... we know that the one who raise the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with him.”
- John 8 - “I am the Light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”
- Psalm 27 - “The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?... I am confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”

Lord, we pray: “Your Kingdom Come... keep faith alive in us. Lead us to grow in faith, as we hear your Word. Move our hearts to share your saving Word. Bring many more into your kingdom.” Amen.