

## **THE GREAT LIGHT: JESUS**

Matthew 4:15-16

Key Verse: 4:16

“...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.”

It is a great privilege to join this historic Latin American International Bible Conference! We want to learn about Jesus Christ and his endless love. As we listen to the Bible’s teachings and trust in Jesus, we can receive a great blessing. In these verses, Apostle Matthew introduces Jesus as the great light. This light is so powerful that it drives out all darkness. May Jesus’ great light shine into our hearts! Let’s pray.

First, Galilee of the Gentiles...people living in darkness. Matthew tells how Jesus began his work as the Messiah. He quotes Isaiah 9:1-2 to show that Jesus Christ came as the Savior of the world in fulfillment of prophecy. Among many specific prophecies, this one tells us about the place where Jesus would carry out his ministry. Three phrases are used to describe the place. The “Land of Zebulun and Naphtali”: this land was given to two of the twelve tribes of Israel. These were not the key tribes in Israel; they were more like supporting actors in a movie. “The Way of the Sea, along the Jordan”: this refers to a major trade route that connected the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River valley. It was significant for travel and commerce. It was a place that people passed through, not a destination. “Galilee of the Gentiles”: this conveys that the region was so overrun by Gentiles that the Jewish identity had been lost. To sum up, the land seemed to be most ordinary and mundane. Yet Galilee is well known to us today. For it is the place where Jesus Christ began his ministry as the Savior of humankind. In Galilee, Jesus healed the sick with great compassion. In Galilee, Jesus spoke words of life to dying souls. In Galilee, Jesus called disciples to a glorious new life. In Galilee, Jesus’ love was displayed for all humankind to see—throughout the generations. Any place where Jesus’ love touches ordinary sinners becomes the most beautiful place in the world. As Jesus Christ touches us here, at this conference, in Oaxtepec, Mexico, it becomes a most beautiful place that remains in Jesus’ salvation history forever.

The prophecy goes on to tell us the spiritual condition of people in the land. The people were “walking in darkness...and in the shadow of death.” Darkness is the absence of light. Spiritually speaking, darkness is the absence of God, and the place where evil

resides. Jesus' ministry began in evil and dark times. For example, John the Baptist, who had lived a holy life—fully dedicated to God's mission—was put into prison. It was because he rebuked the king for his sin of adultery. Instead of repenting, the king imprisoned John and later beheaded him. Oh my! Wickedness seemed to overpower goodness; injustice seemed to triumph over righteousness. The world today is the same. Corrupt leaders condone injustice for their own benefit. The rich abuse the poor and helpless. Ruthless people traffic in drugs and human beings to make money. Violent crime runs rampant. Ordinary people become hardened and selfish in order to survive. This darkness dwells not only in our society, it is also in each and every human heart. Jesus said, "For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly" (Mk 7:21-22). As sin works in us and in our society, it produces decadence and death. The power of death hangs over every person, ever increasing our fear, anxiety and sorrow. And after death comes God's judgment. Living under this dark shadow, people become like the walking dead. It is most tragic to see talented, promising young people wasting their lives under the power of sin and death. Is this darkness the most powerful force there is? No!

Second, a great light has dawned. Though humankind had become so rebellious and wicked, God did not harden his heart. God did not give up on humankind. Instead, God poured out his love upon us with great humility and sacrifice. God so loves the world that he gave his one and only Son Jesus to us. God sent Jesus into the world as a great light. This great light was revealed most clearly at the cross. That is where the sin of the world was laid upon Jesus. All the hatred, perversity, bitterness, contempt, and wickedness of human beings was laid upon Jesus. Jesus' body was crushed. Jesus poured out his life; he shed his blood for our sins. Just before death he said, "It is finished." He paid the full price for our sins. He offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins once and for all. Then he died. On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus Christ's resurrection demonstrates God's victory over sin, death and the devil. God is the everlasting victor and he gives this victory to all who believe in Jesus. Jesus Christ is the great light. No matter how dark a person's life may seem to be, Jesus' great light can overpower the darkness and bring everlasting victory. Jesus' great light transforms people, families, communities and even nations. As we participate in this conference, let's listen to Jesus' words carefully. Let's allow his great light to drive out the darkness of our lives. In this dark world, let's become little lights that reflect the great light, Jesus Christ. May Jesus' great light bring a glorious new day of his salvation, peace, joy and love.