

Living in the Death Shadow

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[0 : 00] So what does your dream home look like? Come on, you've thought of that before. You've thought of if money wasn't an object, if location wasn't an object, and you could have whatever home you wanted, what would it look like?

What would it be like? Let me tell you about my dream home. My dream home, the back of it backs out onto a forest, and there's a path that goes to a lake about 100 meters away that's fed by a waterfall coming down the mountain.

And icy cold water to have morning swims in, and then you come back, and the front of the house, my dream house, is a giant reading room with those leather wingback chairs, you know those big ones you can curl up in with a blanket, a big fireplace, and the whole front of it is glass looking out over the ocean.

And just down some steps is a beach with perfect waves every day. That's my dream home. What's your dream home?

What does your dream home look like? Well, now let me ask you a different question. What is your dream world? What does your dream world look like?

[1 : 20] What kind of world, if you could live in any kind of world, any kind of society, what would your dream world look like? Think about that. Well, today we're going to read a story that Matthew includes here in chapter 4, and it's just a story about Jesus moving house to live by the sea.

But what we'll soon discover as we read it is that he didn't move there to start his dream home, but to start a new world.

Let's pick it up from verse 13. He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea.

Now that sounds lovely, doesn't it? Capernaum by the sea. Sounds like a perfect place for one of those gated communities, you know, where you settle down. The sea, by the way, that it's referring to was not technically a sea.

It wasn't the ocean. It was what's called the Sea of Galilee. It's actually a giant lake in northern Israel. It's about half the size of False Bay. And there's a picture of it behind me.

[2 : 34] Well, no, there's not. But there will be. There you go. So that's actually what Capernaum looks like today. They've uncovered the ruins from Jesus' time. And so you can actually go there and they've still got the foundations of what the original ancient city of Capernaum was like.

They've built some buildings there now. But it looks like a lovely place to settle down, doesn't it? Beautiful area. Sea of Galilee is calm and warm. Beautiful place to settle down, go on holiday, even retire to.

But Jesus did not go to Capernaum to settle down. In fact, he went there to initiate the first stage of the mission that he was sent here for.

And him moving to Capernaum, him moving to this area, was actually a very significant prophetic marker that something big was about to happen. As we read on from verse 14.

This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah. The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali. Along the road by the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

[3 : 45] That's the region that Capernaum was in. The people who live in darkness have seen a great light. And for those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.

Notice in the prophet that this sunny seaside town is described as the land of the shadow of death. Doesn't look like it, does it? Does that look like the land of the shadow of death? And yet it was in reality. And this morning we're going to see why.

And we're going to see why not only did that town need Jesus to come to them, but why we all do. And so let's have a look at what we learn from these few verses.

Firstly, I want to draw your attention to that phrase, the shadow of death. That phrase is actually one word in the Hebrew. It's one noun. And it's literally the death shadow.

[4 : 48] The death shadow. So what is this death shadow that people live under? Well, the death shadow in the Bible, and it's mentioned a few times, is something we all live with.

All of us live with the death shadow. And what it is, it's the inevitability that life will end. And we can't escape the death shadow.

It hangs over everything we do. Whether we realize it or not. Whether it's conscious or subconscious. Every bit of life that we experience has an expiry date.

You know, you get a puppy. And it's cute and it's cool and you're happy. But it's going to die one day.

It's the reality. I mean, we've got a dog. He's full of life. We love Finn. And he's full of beans and full of life. If you know him, if you've met him, you'll know that. But he's going to die one day.

[5 : 53] You know, like you get a pet and you know this about. I know it's a morbid thought. But every now and again I'm on the main road and drive past Peninsula Vet. And I go, that's where I'm going to have to take him to be put down one day probably.

You know, it's a sad thought. But that's the reality of life. All life we enjoy, all the good things end. Sometime. And there are good times in life.

We do enjoy those good moments, you know, with friends. With your loved ones. When everything is just going well. And you're just at peace.

You know those moments in life. That everything has just turned out well. And all the troubles are pushed away. And you enjoy this oasis of joy. But we know that those don't last, do they?

They're just momentary. And we try to cling to them as long as we can. But then before we even get to really enjoy them, they're gone.

[6 : 55] You know, we have times of good health in life where we're not in pain. Where our bodies are working well. But it's not going to stay that way. If you're in a time of good health now, maybe you're young and you think your body is always going to be this fit and this energetic.

It's not. It's only going to get worse. I'm sorry to say. We're only going to get older. And there's only going to be more problems. It's not going to get better.

Now you might say, well, I'm not enjoying the sermon very much. Don't think that way.

That's negative. You mustn't think like that. Right? There's no point thinking that way. It's too depressing. And so we don't think about it. We push it aside.

We distract ourselves from the death shadow. With entertainment and sport and relationships and activities and the things we busy ourselves with.

[7 : 52] And we are so good at that we become experts in distracting ourselves from it so that we forget that the death shadow is even there. But then when everybody goes home and we're by ourselves again, inevitably in the quiet moments, the death shadow comes back to haunt us.

And we realize that happiness is not the default of this world. The happy moments come, but they don't last.

And we realize that we are wasting away. Well, that feeling, and you know what I'm talking about? That's the death shadow.

And it looms over everything we do. And the Bible talks about the death shadow. But why is life like that? I mean, we're so used to it, and we're so used to kind of distracting ourselves from it, but we still feel it in the background, that we don't often stop to ask, well, why is it like that?

Why is that the default? Why is the default, you know, darkness rather than light? Why is the light and why are the happy moments and the joyful moments the things that don't last?

[9 : 11] Why is that the default? Why does the death shadow hang over us? Well, the answer to that question is simple. The death shadow hangs over us because we live in a world that is disconnected from God, the giver of life.

You see, Isaiah's prophecy, when he talks about the death shadow, we need to understand, like with all prophecies that are quoted in the New Testament, we need to go back and look at their original context.

We read the Old Testament earlier. And the original context of this prophecy was actually in exile. When, you know, when the Israelites were taken away by Babylon into exile, by Assyria, then Babylon into exile, God allowed the invasion of this foreign army to defeat them, to take their land and to take them away because of their sin, because of their idolatry, because they had fallen away

from God and His law and they had ignored Him.

And so He let them be just like any other nation. And they lost connection with God. They lost connection with the land and with the temple.

And that is why they are described in exile as being under the death shadow now. Because they are now no different to any other nation, to any of us. We're all under the death shadow.

[10 : 33] And Israel, because of their sin, were also. Under the death shadow. But what's interesting is if you read on in Isaiah, even when they returned to the land, even after the exile was finished and they came back to the land and they came back to the temple, Isaiah still describes them as being under the death shadow.

Because there are still sinners at heart. And so no matter where they went, even when they were back at the temple, they still had the death shadow looming over them and they were not able to escape it.

And we need to realize that too about our lives. We need to come to terms with the fact that no matter where we are, what we do, no matter how religious we are, no matter how enlightened we think we are, we still live under the death shadow.

And we cannot, we are not able to do anything to get rid of that. We are not able to escape the death shadow that looms over us. We can distract ourselves from it, but we can't escape it.

And no matter whether we're Christian or not Christian, whether we come to church every Sunday or not, we are all under this death shadow. But that is not what God wants for this world.

[11 : 51] That is not what God intended for us to live in. He didn't intend for us to live under the death shadow. Why would He? He's a good God.

He made us to live and not to die. So, that's not what He wants. And that's why He sends Isaiah and the other prophets, in a time that His people were very aware of living under the death shadow, to tell them an amazing promise.

That light is coming. Light is coming. A great light, Isaiah calls it, that will bring a new dawn for humanity.

The people living in darkness have seen a great light. And for those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. But, He says, you're first going to see this light.

He prophesies. And by the way, we read it there in the present tense, but it's something called the prophetic present, where it's talking about a future event, but in the present tense, because it's so certain to happen.

[13 : 08] And so, Isaiah is prophesying this coming light is going to appear for those living under the death shadow, but it's going to appear in the place you least expect it. The same place, in fact, that the darkness of the exile first came into the land of Israel, which was the very north, the land of Zebulun and Naphtali.

In an unassuming little seaside town in Galilee, you will see this light appearing. And so, Matthew shows that Jesus moving into Capernaum was the beginning of the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. He is the great light that can break the power of the death shadow. And it's the only time in the history of the world, the history of humanity living under the death shadow, He is the only person, the only time that there is something in our world that can break the death shadow.

And in the rest of Matthew, as we're going to be reading through it in future months, we're going to see how Jesus can break the death shadow, not only by His acts of liberating people from it.

So, as we go through, you'll see that there's various moments where Jesus miraculously goes to people who are heavily under the death shadow and are particularly feeling its effects, and He liberates them from it.

[14 : 39] He liberates these individuals from the effects. He heals people from sickness. He restores sight to the blind. Restores life to the dead.

He shows, He demonstrates that He can overpower the death shadow over people. But, we see it mostly in His ultimate mission.

The ultimate reason He came to this world wasn't just to heal people temporarily. It was to get to the very root of the death shadow, the root of the problem, which is our sin.

And to pay for our sins. The thing that casts the death shadow over us. You see, because that's the reason. You know how shadows work? Shadows are when something gets between you and the source of light, creates a shadow.

And the thing that is between us and the light of life is our sin. And so, Jesus comes to this earth to deal with the very source of what is causing the shadow over us.

[15 : 49] And He came to absorb that shadow and take it on Himself. So that we don't have to live under it anymore.

When He died on the cross. You know what happened there when He died on the cross? Darkness covered the whole land. There's a reason for that.

See, the death shadow was coming over Jesus at the moment that He was hanging there on the cross. And it was focused on Him. And right there, He was separated from His Father.

He was disconnected from His Father for humanity. And the death shadow took Him. And He died. And it claimed another victim. But it couldn't hold Him. The death shadow couldn't hold Jesus. Because Jesus is the light.

[16 : 49] And darkness can't beat light. Have you ever noticed that? Darkness doesn't beat light. Ever. So, if you've got, say, two rooms.

One's full of light and one's full of darkness. And you've got a partition between them, separating them. And then you remove that partition. Is the darkness going to overcome the light?

Or is the light going to overcome the darkness? The light will win. Every time. And that's why the death shadow could not hold Jesus in death. Because He is the light Himself.

And light always overcomes darkness. And that light that can overcome the darkness, that is exactly what happened when Jesus came into our world.

We've got to realize that about His coming into our world. It was like removing that partition that separates the light from the dark and letting the light flood in.

[17 : 45] Light came into the world that can overcome the death shadow over humanity when Jesus came here. And that is why the arrival of Jesus is described as the beginning of the dawn of this world.

Look at verse 16 again in Matthew 4. For those living in the land of the death shadow, a light has dawned. It's the dawning of the first light for our world.

You know first light when you, I don't know if you've ever stayed up long enough or you've woken up early enough when it's still dark to watch the dawn.

I've done that a few times. It's quite a cool experience. You come out at night and then you just sit and you look towards the east. And then it starts almost imperceptibly.

You notice there's not as many stars by the horizon. And then slowly but surely you notice a glow starts and it starts to get less and less dark.

[18 : 53] And then this light starts spreading across the sky. And you know that at that moment you know the night is coming to an end. The day hasn't come yet but you can see it coming.

And the night you know is now coming to an end. Well that is what happened when Jesus arrived on this earth. The light began to spread.

And it is spreading right now. What is happening now in the world what is happening in this age since the arrival of Jesus between now and His second coming is that dawn growing that light that was just imperceptible at first now growing and the darkness getting less and less that light is spreading right now as Jesus enters into people's lives all around the world.

In Japan in South Africa in South America in India everywhere there is light that is starting to spread around the world and it has been ever since Jesus has been here ever since He died for us and His gospel has gone out over all the world and Isaiah prophesied that this would happen hundreds of years before Isaiah prophesied this Isaiah 49 verse 6 Isaiah is recording essentially the father talking to his son and he says it is not enough for you to be my servant raising up the tribes of Jacob and restoring the protected ones of Israel I will also make you a light for the nations to be my salvation to the ends of the earth and Isaiah 60 verse 2 to 3 says for look darkness will cover the earth a total darkness the peoples but the Lord will shine over you and His glory will appear over you nations will come to your light and kings to your shining brightness that was addressed to the nation of Israel but it was because that is where

Jesus first came this was all about Jesus these prophecies and it's talking about people from nations that had nothing to do with Israel coming now to see the light that began there how does that happen well Paul tells us in the New Testament 2 Corinthians 4 6 for God who said let light shine out of darkness talking about creation when God first made the world and brought light into the darkness has shone in our hearts Christians to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in

the face of Jesus Christ we see the glory of God and the light coming in the face of Jesus Christ as we look at the gospel and we believe the gospel even though Jesus was an Israelite from a land that most of us have never been to far away long ago and yet people from every nation are looking to that light are looking to that

[22 : 14] Jew who came and turned out to be the light from heaven that is going to overcome the death shadow has that happened to you yet are you one of those people who have seen that light and believed in it has that happened to you has the light shone in your heart to give you the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ yet I'm not asking do you come to church or are you a Christian I'm asking whether you have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and that has become your everything and your every hope and it is the thing that is shining light into your life to overcome the darkness has that happened for you yet because it's happened for millions of others around the world light has been spreading wherever the gospel of Jesus is preached light spreads into darkness and because of that because of the spreading light that is happening right now in nations all over the world you know what it means it means night is definitely coming to an end just like you see the light of that dawn in the east and you know nights days are numbered doesn't make sense nights minutes are numbered you know night is coming to an end well so when we look around and we see the gospel spreading and we see people coming to faith in

Jesus Christ we know the night is coming to an end but the day has not yet arrived the day is not yet here and so we still live under the death shadow right now even though we can see the signs of the dawn we still live under the death shadow we still feel its effects we still grow old loved ones still die the happy moments are still temporary but we Christians can see the beginning of the dawn through eyes of faith as we as we take in God's word and we believe it you know last week we learned Jesus told the devil man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from God because this is the word that brings the light into our life that enables us to have the eyes that can see the dawn if you don't read this you cannot see the dawn as we take this in and we let it absorb into our lives then we start to have eyes that can see the dawn coming even as we still live under the death shadow and that is what enables us to endure the darkness in this world and to overcome it even while we are still under it

I want to read to you some amazing verses from the New Testament Romans 13 12 says you don't have to turn there verses will be on the screen the night is nearly over and the day is near the night is nearly over and the day is near and 1 Thessalonians 5 8 since we belong to the day let us be self controlled and let us put on the armor of faith and love and a helmet of the hope of salvation to protect us to protect our minds that's why you put a helmet on to protect your most vital part of your body which is your brain and we put a helmet on to protect our minds from the death shadow because it can so easily bring us down it can so easily depress us it can so easily cause us to just lose all joy and all hope that we put on the helmet that the eyes of faith in reading the word give us and that protects us from its effects a Christian you see is someone who doesn't let living under the death shadow ultimately bring them down we still feel it we can't escape that much as we'd like to much as we'd like to believe the false gospels of oh you're going to have a lovely life if you become a

Christian it's not true if anything it gets harder we still feel the death shadow over us we still get older we still get sick we still get sad we still get depressed and we get less and less able to distract ourselves from the difficulties and the pain of life but the difference is that Christians don't let that overwhelm them they don't let that death shadow have the last word because there is something inside us that is stronger than the death shadow now if we are believers you know Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4 16 we do not give up though outwardly we are wasting away inwardly we are being renewed day by day because you see when we feel the outward wasting away as Christians what we do is we lift our eyes above the death shadow and we look at the dawn we look at the light that is coming we look to the dawn and we live lives that are appropriate for the day that we know is coming we don't live lives that are appropriate for the night that is passing away we start living for the day because we look to the dawn that is what

Christians do when they feel the death shadow over them do you do that do you do that or do you let the death shadow overwhelm you put on put on the helmet of the hope of salvation and through the eyes of faith that God has given you in his word look to the dawn so that you can live for the day and you know what happens when you do that Christian the amazing thing happens you actually become a light for other people you start to point other people to the dawn when you start to live

that way when you start to react to the darkness with hope and look to the dawn then you become a light for others as Jesus will go on to say to his disciples here in Matthew in Matthew chapter 5 14 to 15 he says you are the light of the world a city situated on a hill cannot be hidden no one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket but rather up on a lamp stand and it gives light for all who are in the house think of your friends who are still under the death shadow just distracting themselves from the inevitable darkness that will one day overwhelm them think of them picture them now your friends who are just under the death shadow and have no hope yes they're distracting themselves they might be happy right now but ultimately that death shadow is going to overwhelm them think of them will you be the light for them will you point them to the coming dawn will you pray for opportunities to point them to

[30 : 07] Jesus the light who has come to overcome the death shadow and perhaps even invite them to church with you next week so that they can see the light for themselves let's pray oh lord we thank you for revealing to us with eyes of faith in your word that death and darkness does not have the last say that you did not make us to die you did not make us to live hopelessly under the shadow of death but you made us to live even though we are sinners and we have brought ourselves into this situation we live under lord we thank you for the hope we thank you for your plan of salvation that you have sent light into this world that can overcome the death shadow and that there is light in the lives of believers that can overcome the shadow of death over us help us to live for the day and as we do help us to point others to it in Jesus name amen