

Light in the Darkness

Westview Church | Isaiah 9:2 | Pastor Brett Toney | December 24, 2020

Through our time together this evening, our readings have come from the prophet Isaiah and have paralleled the movement in these familiar songs from that of expectation to fulfillment in Jesus' birth to rejoicing in that first Christmas so many years ago. And yet perhaps because of the weight of this year, or even just the challenges of this past week, you find yourself going through the motions this evening. You find no reason for there to be joy to the world. Loneliness, isolation, anxiety, fear, death—these have marked 2020 for many ... for you?

Isaiah also lived in a fear-laden and uncertain time. Not only that, but he was given a message that even harder times lay ahead. Yet he was not without hope. He writes, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined." Surely you can relate to the physical imagery of walking in darkness. You wake in the middle of the night and stumble about, stepping on a Lego, looking for anything to orient you. But you perhaps also know the tidal wave of fear of dwelling in deep darkness. That phrase, "deep darkness," could also be put "shadow of death." It feels suffocating, immobilizing—the very substance of despair. And as you look to what is to come in the new year, like Isaiah, things don't look any better.

It is into this very context, into your very experience of 2020, that Isaiah speaks this word of hope. There is not just a glimmer of guidance, but a great

light is seen. Down to the lonesome depths of your soul's dark winter has light shined. The oppression of your suffering is broken. The burning anguish of your conflict is extinguished. How can these things be? How can there be such hope in a year such as this? Because a child is born, a son is given. This child is full of wisdom, is God himself, is protective compassion, the Restorer of all things.

You are here this evening perhaps because of family tradition, or because you know this hope and are rejoicing in it, or because you are well acquainted with the darkness and don't know where else to turn. Whatever the reason, Christmas is not merely an annual tradition. It is the needed reminder of who we are and what we need. We are a people in darkness, stumbling about in sin making a mess of everything. We are a people with the certainty of death. And what we need most is light—we need the shadow of death expelled.

I trust you have grown in your sense of this over the course of the year. As virus statistics and death tallies are daily broadcasted, the reality of our own mortality is brought before our faces. Or kids, as your school wasn't able to meet in person or your favorite activities had to be cancelled, that has been hard and a reminder of sin in our world—sin that impacts the very creation with sickness and sorrow. Sin and its effects feel like darkness.

The hope of Christmas is that the Sun has risen, the dawn has come. That hope is in the birth of this son Isaiah anticipated, the birth of Jesus of Nazareth himself. Through the long centuries between Isaiah and Jesus, darkness loomed and hope was distant. Yet we now have the great fortune of looking back

through these two millennia to recall a historical fact. A child of humble origin was born and changed the course of history forever. And if Isaiah's anticipation of this child was true, then his description of this child must be true as well. This child, Jesus Christ, is the very Light that pierces the darkness. He is the Sun that dispels the despair of night. And so, I implore you, behold the splendor and wonder of the Son. Turn from the darkness and walk in the light. This child grew up to be the King who died in the place of his sinful people that he might rise from the dead to secure their hope and deliverance. It is this light of hope that God would have you reflect on and celebrate in the hardship and sorrow and darkness of this year.

Yet you may be thinking it has been two-thousand years. What hope is there in a guy who lived then? Friend, our hope is not merely that the Light came, that death was defeated, but that the tomb was empty. Jesus rose in victory, guaranteeing his sure promise that he would return. And so at Christmas, we look back to rejoice that Christ has come and hold out to one another the certainty that Christ will come again. In our darkness, we have seen a great light. Under the shadow of death, the light of Christ shines. And in this we hope.

Each Sunday of Advent, we light another candle to remind each other of this growing light, this growing hope. Tonight, we light the Christ Candle. *The* Light has come and spreads to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

[Pray]

Join me in illuminating your candle by twisting the top piece and singing our hope. Christ has come; Christ will come again.

[Sing *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*]

Benediction

The LORD bless you and keep you;

the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

the LORD lift up the light of his countenance upon you and grant you his peace.