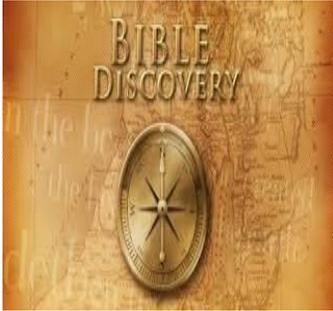


God Shows Us with His Wonderful Gifts



Christmas! Even the word brings a smile to our lips. We light trees, sing carols, share gifts and hopefully show a little more love to one another. Christmas reminds us of the wonder of God's love and so as we begin our journey in Advent this year, seeking the hope we find only in Him, I invite you to pause and consider the wonderful gifts which God showers us with. Consider that rather than clinging to what He could get, God gave freely, sacrificially for you and me.

God is always giving. In fact God's gift-giving began with the creation of Adam and Eve; He did this not because He needs us, not because He needs the adoration of the human race, but He gave abundantly so He would have a recipient to His generosity. That's why God calls us to follow His Son Jesus – not out of desperate need for our service, but because He lovingly wants to shower us with salvation. To follow the Saviour, God's wonderful gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, is to share in that salvation as much as coming to light is to be in the light.

"If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." [1 John 1:7] John's reminding us, as people who're in the light, we don't provide the light but are illuminated and made right by it; we reflect the light that has shone on us. We don't contribute anything through our own work or ability, but being illuminated, we graciously receive the full benefit of that marvelous light from our Heavenly Father. Though once we were among those walking in darkness, we're able to rejoice because the light has dawned and darkness has been driven back. What a gift God has given to us!

Irenaeus, the early 2nd century Bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul which is now Lyon, France, was an early church Father and apologist whose writings were formative in the early development of Christian theology. He writes, "God requests human obedience so that his love and his pity may have an opportunity of doing good to those who serve him diligently. The less God has need of anything, the more human beings need to be united with him. Consequently, a human being's true glory is to persevere in the service of God." [Excerpted from *Against Heresies*, 4, 25] So it is - God comes to us; He comes not with arbitrary demand that we bend a knee and worship Him; He comes not with a decree that we can do no less than acknowledge Him as God and be his people; no, He comes humbly as a baby born in a manger, dependent on the woman Mary and the man Joseph - his earthly, human parents – chosen to provide for His every physical need here on earth.

God comes to us... He comes humbly as a baby born in a manger!

He comes that we might rejoice in His coming; so that we might proclaim Him out of *our* love with our joyous response, *"...as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder"*. No holding back, no reservation, as a farmer finished with the harvest after a long summer, like warriors who have survived a long battle – perhaps months and have won! In other words – wholeheartedly! Shouldn't we rejoice, shouldn't we sing merrily, shouldn't we be joyous? We've been set free from our bondage! Jesus has come to set the captives free, to shatter the yoke of oppression, to overcome sin and vanquish the enemy from our midst that we may enjoy fellowship with God for all eternity.

When we look about us at the brightly lit Christmas trees we're reminded of Christ's glorious light shining in the darkness. God's promises found in our reading from Isaiah 9:2-7, sparks anew our hope that even in the darkest, most devastating situations, God is with us for *"to us a child is born, for us a Son is given"*. Immanuel, God with us, is the story centered on His birth, life and eternal reign as our Lord Messiah, Jesus Christ. God truly showers us with His wonderful gifts and they're all wrapped in Jesus.

May I suggest that to aid us in finding the gifts God showers us with, Isaiah provides two key links to Christ? Let me explain briefly what I mean.

The Hope of the Coming Light (vs. 2-5)

Think of a time when you found yourself in darkness. I'm talking about total darkness – the can't see your hand in front of your own face kind of darkness. Remember a time, perhaps as you drove with headlights not bright enough on a dark road without any lines and consider what it was like as you weaved your way along, hoping you were where you thought you were. Darkness has a way of associating with damp, cold, uncomfortable conditions which we readily want to move away from. Within the shrill depth of despair the darkness had formed over Israel as she was being led into captivity. One can see the gloom painted through Isaiah's use of key words in the start of this chapter – gloom, darkness, anguish, and a dark land. Their condition becomes ours if we too choose to be a people without the promise of God; like a people choosing to have Christmas without Christ. It's like having a candle in the midst of darkness with no means to light it; having a heart devoid of love, a body without clothes for warmth; a face of dismay able only to show suffering and pain.

Without Christ in Christmas we're like the Israelites being led into a foreign land, having nothing to live for except a lone message of hope from some prophet having nothing to possess to give us assurance. For the Israelites the land represented their inheritance from God – that's why the year of Jubilee was given every seven years so that the land returned to the original family. Our inheritance is through our position in our Lord Jesus. Though our contemporary circumstances may differ, this message of hope remains the only source of light for our lives.

Darkness by definition's the absence of light. No warmth or security. No direction or pattern. In his day, Isaiah was probably commenting on how the northern kingdom had already been captured and the threats of extermination were now reaching the southern kingdom of Judah. Darkness abounds in our land too. We display our lack of constraint not only by greedily spending money we don't have on items we don't need or for friends we don't really like, and often with gifts for loved ones which they don't really want; but displayed by a culture which has reached new lows. Internet, TV, sports events, all take precedence over relationships that matter. Even at Christmas it has become a case of getting rather than giving. At the heart of the matter we've relegated God to our spare time – if we have any. While we may look with disdain on the foolish acts of others, perhaps thanking God we would never conduct ourselves in that way, we neglect to control other often as outrageous behaviours in our own lives. Though humans boast of evolving, we indeed are retreating into beast-likeness by our ruinous choices. Violence, drugs for escape, PTSD, suicide, emotional troubles are

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all occurring because people refuse to live by God's ways looking to God's Son, celebrating a life of forgiveness and love. We live in moral darkness allowing worldly forces to brazenly spread filth over all of us, no matter what country we live in. Oh that we would turn from our wicked ways, step back from the flames of destruction, allow the yoke of our burdens to be shattered and accept Christ as the center, the meaning, the very focus of our Christmas. Oh that we would receive the showers of God's wonderful gift. The glory of God's revealed to us at Christmas; revealed in the wonderful way Christ brought such an impact in His day and shows us the way we as His people are to live out our lives imitating His light. *"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you."* [Isaiah 60:1-2]

Let the Lord your God shower you with the wonderful gift of His Son Jesus who reveals His glory comes to you, bringing you light that you may escape the darkness.

The Source of Comforting Light (vs. 6-7)

The themes of darkness and light are presented by Isaiah to demonstrate the changes Jesus brings in His Kingdom on earth. We're challenged by the powerful names of the Messiah revealed to us to live our lives with inspiration and joy as we see the promises of God fulfilled in His Son, the source of security-enduring peace, the wonderful Saviour, the source of comforting eternal light. Such is why John the Baptist could testify to the light – *the light that shines in the darkness* [John 1:5]. We know Jesus was and is "*the true light that gives light to every man*" and as the Apostle John tells us, He "*was coming into the world.*" Such comfort comes only from the God of all comfort and comes in the person of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Paradoxically, our hope rests on the child born in a borrowed manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes, away from public scrutiny, yet one who would reign forever over His kingdom bringing people out of permanent darkness into marvelous light. This is the glorious kingdom of God now in our midst, growing more and more apparent around the world despite what we witness here at home. The liberal media news mentions nothing of the growing Kingdom of Jesus, yet nothing will stop its reach to the ends of the world. If we could stand on the observer deck of earth and time, we'd witness God's mighty redemptive plan being fulfilled. Isaiah mentions our Messiah within four distinct descriptions. Each serves as a foundation for His wonderful reign. Each reflects never-changing policies built on who He is rather than mere passing consensus. Each reveals the advantage of trusting Him alone.

- ***Wonderful Counselor***: I can gain from Christ's wisdom
- ***Mighty God***: I can rely on Christ's power
- ***Eternal Father***: I can embrace Christ's care
- ***Prince of Peace***: I can receive Christ's healing

Without these trusts in our great Lord, we'll not love our neighbour as ourselves or love ourselves for that matter; we'll be too busy trying to satisfy our endless needs. Each Name's a faith enabler – a wonderful gift from God to us through His Son. It's like a key to a special part of our hearts opening us to faith to live a good and powerful Christian life. Without this key, we remain chained to our own resources missing out on God's presence. Jesus Christ is the gift of God poured out for you and me. He's the Wonderful Counselor with His infinite wisdom; the mighty God providing strength and power to overcome; the visible image of the invisible eternal Father who loves you; and the Prince of Peace giving healing, and joy, and love, which brings peace that passes understanding. Why should we, would we, could we, ever think other sources for comfort, other means of light, other avenues for salvation, are better than knowing Jesus?

Is there some way you still don't trust the Lord with all your life? Perhaps it's some sickness, some odd circumstance or person who's entered your life. Perhaps it's that part of your life which you think you have under control. Perhaps you have too much to lose – *or so you think*. Go to the Wonderful Counselor. ***It's free!*** It can't be earned; it's the wonderful gift showered upon you by God's grace. The counsel can't be beat. Just remember to turn and follow Him in all ways even if it seems a bit silly or strange. And then I know you'll truly have a very merry Christmas for you will have Jesus, not only for a season, but eternally!

Blessings to you as you enter this Advent season. Give us a call or send an email and let us know how the Lord Jesus is central in your life this year.

Blessings,

Pastor Dave

**Jesus Christ is
the gift of God
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